Title: Beyond Individual Learning Plans - exploring goal setting with adult learners

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Abstract

The ability to direct learning independently of the teacher and outside of the classroom is considered essential to successful language learning. This is particularly important for migrant ESOL learners in the UK. It is a sad irony that these learners, despite living in an English speaking country, far from being immersed in the language, often find themselves isolated from a wider linguistic community and have very few opportunities to use or practise their language skills.

This study, which takes place in community settings in London, builds on the research by the likes of Locke and Latham (2002), Oettingen (2014) and Golwitzer (2011) and investigates strategies that can help learners develop the ability to self-direct learning of English outside of the classroom. In particular, it looks at the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) and the goal setting methodology underlying this document and seeks to establish if it can be re-engineered and 'de-institutionalised' to foster learner autonomy and promote out-of-classroom learning. Specifically, learners are asked to keep a goal diary where they themselves write and review their course and weekly goals. The goal setting and the review of progress is shared in the classroom.

The research study is placed within the interpretivist paradigm which argues that direct observation is not the only way of knowing about the world and allows us to delve deeper into the object of our inquiry and gain a more profound understanding of it. Where positivism concerns itself with large datasets in pursuit of statistical significance, interpretivism endeavours to understand the subjective world of the human experience.

Due to its unique context the study also employs action research methodology which in addition to bridging the doing (practice), learning (study), and reflection (inquiry), gives the practitioner researcher the tools required to carry out the research in an ongoing, systematic and recursive way. It uses surveys, questionnaires and interviews to collect predominantly qualitative data.

Participants are empowered through the use of narrative inquiry which creates opportunities both for researchers and the researched to work collaboratively, constructing narrative as a caring community (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). This not

only captures and tells their stories but also gives voice to this underrepresented community.

The results reveal that keeping a goals diary and setting weekly goals can lead to an increase in language use outside of the classroom, an increase in confidence, greater autonomy and improved language skills.

This study also contributes to the discussion around the use of Individual Learning Plans – an area that is largely underrepresented in the literature – and provides details of a working model which could be used by teachers as an alternative to the standard ILP model and process.

Key words:

Goals, goal setting, ESOL, Individual Learning Plan (ILP), teaching, learning, action research, narrative inquiry, autonomy,

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A note on register and tone

The somewhat unconventional choice of narrative devices used throughout this thesis is an intentional methodological decision - a deliberate attempt to capture and present the lived experience of being involved in action research. Through the use of brief personal accounts and conversational style, I try to bring the context to life and hope to create a more immersive experience for the reader. I wish to give an account that is both engaging and accessible - one that brings the reader into the experience.

Positionality

As a language student myself, I intimately understand the struggles many of my students face with learning a language. I have always been curious about ways to improve my own language skills - about what makes one an effective language learner. My first experience of personal 'research' came when at the age of 18 I failed my entry exam to a teacher training college because I lacked the prerequisite oral fluency in English. This was a deeply formative experience for me. As a teenager, I was diffident and self-conscious which meant that whilst I did very well in reading, writing and grammar, I struggled with being put on the spot when answering oral questions. Needless to say, I often avoided such situations. Failing that exam helped me to understand that in order to improve I had to step outside my comfort zone, put aside my own insecurities and inhibitions and start using English. In the year that followed, I resolved to actively seek out opportunities to practise English (not an easy task in pre-Internet Poland of the 90s!). No longer in formal education and with limited funds, I had to organise all my learning myself. I passed my exam the following year but the experience had left a lasting effect on me.

As a trainee teacher (and still a language learner), I continued to be curious not only about effective teaching methods but, perhaps egocentrically, also learning approaches. I remember reading a study which described Turkish migrants who despite living in Germany for most of their lives never fully learnt the language. As a firm believer in learning through immersion, I found this fact puzzling. Many years later, having lived and taught in another country, I have a greater appreciation for the challenges and complexities of language learning. However, that early experience of failing my exam is

still there. It reminds me that, ultimately, it was I who was responsible for the decisions and choices that eventually determined the, thankfully, successful outcome.

Research therefore has always had a personal dimension for me. It has often stemmed from my own experience as a language learner. It has been driven by my intuitions and hypotheses shaped by that experience. In a strange way, it seems that failing my exam has not only made me a better learner but also a better teacher.

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Chapter 1 (context) - Setting out the stall

Migration is an expression of the human aspiration for dignity, safety and a better future. It is part of the social fabric, part of our very make-up as a human family

Ban Ki-moon

Abdi[1]

Some of the most inspiring stories are told in some of the most uninspiring places by some of the most unassuming people. This one was told at a community centre by Abdi - a sixteen-year-old asylum seeker from Syria who had been in the country for only a few weeks. I happened to be attending a meeting there with a CEO of a charity that was providing sessions for unaccompanied minors when she suggested that I sit in on one of the sessions and meet her 'stakeholders'. When I entered the room, Abdi was describing his journey to the UK to a group of his peers. He spoke with an accent but otherwise fluently. We learnt that it had taken him two years to get here. His journey led him through Turkey, Greece, Italy, France..., in fact his knowledge of geography was exceptional. He walked on foot or travelled on the backs of lorries and when he had to, he negotiated prices with smugglers. He relied on his wit and resourcefulness to keep moving and the generosity and charity of strangers for money and day-to-day sustenance.

Unfortunately, it didn't occur to me to take notes at the time so I don't have all the details which is why my account of his journey doesn't give it justice. But the story has left a lasting impression on me. Not least because Abdi who travelled across two continents on his own to get to the UK, would have been fourteen or fifteen when he set off - the same age as my daughter. What I do remember well was the manner in which he was recalling the story. Despite the obvious risks and challenges he would have encountered, he spoke matter-of-factly and without bragging. I soon understood why. As I looked around the

[1] Not a real name. To protect the identity of the participants, the names of all the named characters in this thesis have been changed.

room I noticed that all his peers were nodding understandingly, clearly relating to the events Abdi was describing. They had all done this journey.

I don't know why of all the EU countries Abdi had chosen the UK as his destination. Maybe it was his knowledge of English or the stories about the UK that he'd heard back home but one thing is for certain - like everyone else in the room, Abdi left in search of a better, safer future.

Having achieved his goal, he's ready for the next chapter of his life.

Context and problem

This study is placed within ESOL community settings in London. Although the research itself covers a small geographical area of London and looks at a very focused aspect of language teaching and learning (i.e. goal setting and motivation), the context in which it is set is much broader. It is the context of migration and the provision of language learning for new arrivals to the UK where the research is situated. It is also the context of integration in which language plays a key role. Finally, it is the context of dreams and aspirations with which people arrive in a new, often unfamiliar country.

As such the study seeks to answer the following overarching questions:

- To what extent can goal setting lead to an increased sense of agency and autonomy in ESOL learners?
- To what extent can goal setting help to motivate ESOL learners to practise language skills in their own time through self-directed study?
- To what extent can setting own goals increase the time English is used outside of the class?
- To what extent can goal setting help ESOL learners improve their language skills as specified in their course goals?

Migration

Conflicts and political instability around the world have led to mass migration. A recent PwC report states: *According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, or The UN Refugee Agency), there are currently 59.5 million people across the world who have been displaced, 19.5 million of these are refugees. (PwC 2017: 3)*

The conflict in Syria has led to a displacement of population within as well as without the country. The main brunt of this displacement (particularly from conflict areas in Iraq and Syria) has been borne by neighbouring countries. There are an estimated 5,400,000 registered refugees in Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon (Syrian Refugee Camps, Wikipedia accessed on Feb 2018) of which about 10% live in 40 refugee camps which have been set up in Turkey, Jordan and Iraq (Shen, 2017).

However, Europe itself has not escaped the fallout from these conflicts. The continent has seen an unprecedented surge in inward migration. In 2015 more than 1,011,700 migrants arrived by sea and, almost 34,900 arrived by land, according to estimates by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) although the EU external border force, Frontex, puts this number at 1,800,000 (BBC, 2016). The year was subsequently branded the year of the migrant crisis by many in Europe.

Not all EU countries were affected equally. Countries such as Italy, Greece and Hungary had to deal with the initial impact of this mass migration as they were the main landing points for migrants arriving via the Mediterranean and Balkan routes. This has led to tensions among member states. The European Commission appealed to the bloc's member states to accept quotas of migrants to relieve the burden on these countries but not everyone is happy about these decisions. Eastern and Central European countries oppose the mandatory quotas, so do Britain and Ireland (The New York Times, 2015). Others such as Germany and Sweden have been more welcoming. The PwC paper reports that according to the UNHCR, Germany has accepted the greatest number of migrants in Europe in absolute terms, with an estimated 964,574 new migrants in 2015. Of this, approximately 484,000 of the migrants came from Syria. Sweden has accepted 190,000 refugees (the highest on a per capita basis) By comparison, the UK has made a [voluntary] commitment to accept 20,000 Syrian refugees from UNHCR camps over the next five years. (PwC, 2017)

However, in addition to this external migration, Europe has had its own internal migration caused by its own expansion. When the so called A8 (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia) and A2 (Romania and Bulgaria) countries joined the EU in May 2004 and March 2007 respectively, their citizens left their countries for 'the West' in search of better paid employment opportunities and/or to start new lives there. For example, according to a recent article in Business Review (2018), the rate of migration from Romania in the last ten years has been the second largest after Syria at 3.4 million.

This has led to profound changes in the demographics of host nations. For example, it is estimated that as many as 916,000 Poles have settled in the UK 'dethroning' the Irish as the largest non-British nationality (BBC, 2017). It is also worth pointing out that there were only 38,000 Poles living in the UK in 2001 (BBC, 2017)., The proportion of EU citizens in the UK increased from 1 in 100 in 2001 to 5 in 100 in 2015 (BBC, 2017). According to a recent BBC 'Reality Check' report the migrants that arrived in 2016 joined an estimated 5.567 million citizens of other countries already living in the UK in 2015. Of these, the number of EU citizens is estimated at 3.2 million and the number of non-EU citizens at 2.4 million (BBC, 2017).

Migration into the UK is nothing new. Migrants have been shaping the British identity since the time of the Romans. Together with their descendants, they have made lasting contributions to British culture, its language, cuisine as well as its economy. Migrants have filled jobs and skills shortages in various sectors of the economy from low-skilled jobs such as fruit pickers, to highly skilled jobs in medicine, education and law. Historically, migrants and their families have faced hostility and discrimination. Despite the strides that have been made to combat discrimination through anti-discrimination legislation and political representation, racism, discrimination and inequalities still remain (Runnymede, 2018).

However, the scale of the recent migration has been unprecedented. When in 2004 the then Labour Government decided to grant citizens of A8 countries unfettered access to the UK labour market, the expected number of migrants was forecast to be in the region of 5 to 10 thousand a year not the hundreds of thousands that subsequently arrived (the conversation, 2016).

Achieving harmony - community cohesion/integration

Generally, migrants arriving in a new country tend to live in poorer communities and are in low paid jobs as they try to gain a foothold in their new country (BBC, 2013). They also tend to settle in areas with communities representing their own language and background. They create new or tap into existing support networks based on their friends and families - people who speak their language. It has been argued that poverty and ethnic segregation are negatively correlated with social cohesion (BBC, 2013). Social diversity can induce a sense of threat and tension between minority and majority groups which may arise out of a number of factors putting these groups in 'conflict' with one another (Sturgis, et.al., 2014). One of these factors includes real or perceived competition over resources such as jobs, housing, school places for children and the National Health Service. In their 2014 paper Patrick Sturgis, Professor of Quantitative Social Science, and his colleagues draw on a conflict theory proposed by Blalock (1967 in Sturgis, et al, 2014) to explain this tension. According to this theory such perceived threats to the status quo resulting from community ethnic diversity are seen as giving rise to stereotypical characterization and discriminatory treatment of ethnic out-groups (2014:1288).

Newspaper headlines such as **Immigrants create overcrowding and fuel tensions, report finds** (The Telegraph 03 Jul 2013) or **Hazel Blears: Immigration fuels social tension** (The Telegraph, 11 June 2008) seem to lend support to the conflict theory. However, in the same 2014 paper Sturgis and colleagues paint a different picture. Contrary to the assertion that diversity leads to social tension as proposed in the conflict theory, they suggest that diversity may actually be a positive predictor of social cohesion and propose an opposing 'contact' theory (Sturgis et al. 2014). The study is based in London which may partly explain the findings. London, as the authors point out, despite being one of the most diverse cities in the world, is also one of the least segregated parts of the UK. This means that there are more opportunities for different groups to come into contact and interact with one another. This direct contact between diverse groups of people can reduce stereotyping and prejudice and replace them with positive schema based on personal and direct experience (Sturgis et al. 2014). Sturgis et al. state that such "*[p]ositive individual-level interactions are generalized to the ethnic out-group to which the individual belongs and, potentially, to ethnic outgroups as a whole. This results in the dissipation of negative stereotypes and, as a consequence, a reduction in inter-*

group prejudice and conflict." (2014:1289) This assertion is followed up by a recommendation that contact theory as a means of building community cohesion should not be dismissed despite the negative associations sometimes observed between diversity and trust. Sturgis et al. stipulate that these negative associations could result from insufficient or wrong quality intergroup contact to engender trust and other positive intergroup attitudes (2014).

A recent government strategy, the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper (HM Government, March 2018), aims to tackle segregation head on. It hopes to achieve this by applying contact theory, i.e. through increasing integration, social mixing. Other measures proposed in the paper include:

- strengthening leadership to drive integration in policy development and service delivery
- supporting newly arrived migrants to integrate and improve communities' ability to adapt to migration
- making sure all children and young people are prepared for life in modern Britain and have the opportunity for meaningful social mixing with those from different backgrounds,
- boosting English language skills – which are fundamental to being able to take advantage of the opportunities of living in modern Britain such as getting a job, mixing with people and playing a full part in community life
- increasing economic opportunity (HM Government, March 2018)

This Integrated Communities Strategy is a consultation document which builds on existing good practice and previous initiatives, e.g. the Industrial Strategy, which sets out government's plans for a Britain that is fit for the future including promoting good jobs and opportunities for people to reach their full potential, and David Lammy's independent review into the treatment of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people in the criminal justice system. The authors of the paper are keen to emphasize that the Strategy does not stand alone rather *'[i]t complements and underpins the government's aim to create a country that works for everyone, whatever their background and wherever they come from.'* (HM Government, 2018:12)

However, the term ‘integration’ itself may have a somewhat insidious or negative connotation. In a response briefing to the government paper, Runnymede Trust – an independent race equality think tank – notes that the term integration is controversial because it implies that the responsibility for integration or lack thereof should be placed solely on ethnic minorities: *The concern is that integration frames ethnic minorities, including those born in Britain, as a problem, or as not properly belonging here.’* (Runnymede, 2018, no page numbers).

The authors of the briefing note that integration is a complex multidimensional process and identify five domains of integration: socioeconomic, political, spatial, cultural and interpersonal. They argue that everyone, not just minorities, are responsible for ‘*creating a successful and harmonious society; new arrivals, established minority communities, the host society and its institutions must work together to overcome difference and discrimination.’* (Runnymede, 2018)

Integration and language provision in the UK

One of the largest integration gaps identified in the Runnymede report (where the number of ethnic minority people disadvantaged differs most from the number of white British people disadvantaged) is fluency in English; however, the authors also point out that not all Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups are in need of ESOL classes: ‘*There are also substantial differences between different age groups, and between new arrivals and settled communities.’* (Runnymede, 2018)

BME women are another group identified as missing out on English language classes. The reasons for this are manifold. An article in the Guardian lists, opposition at home and badly timed classes as two such reasons (Casey, 2016). Another reason could be women’s childcare commitments. Lack of crèche or childcare facilities and the cost of travel can be significant barriers for BME women on lower incomes in attending classes (Runnymede, 2018).

The authors of the Green Paper (HM Government, 2018) recognise that only through an effective provision of language learning for migrants can they fulfil the vision of a coherent society.

Sturgis and colleagues note that '*where studies have included measures of the extent of interpersonal contact within neighbourhoods, they have been found to act as important moderators of the effect of ethnic diversity on trust. In ethnically diverse neighbourhoods, those who report having frequent contact with people in their neighbourhood are considerably more trusting of people in general than those who have little or no interpersonal contact, irrespective of which ethnic group they belong to.' (2014: 1303)*

It is not possible to have meaningful interpersonal contact within a neighbourhood if the members of that community do not have a shared *lingua franca*. Consequently, lack of interpersonal contact often leads to suspicion, stereotyping and a lack of trust between groups.

Unsurprisingly, English language provision and requirements feature quite prominently in the Green Paper. In their vision for boosting language skills, the authors state: '*Everyone living in England should be able to speak and understand English so they can integrate into life in this country by getting a job or improving their prospects at work, accessing and making good use of local services, becoming part of community life and making friendships with people from different backgrounds. With improved levels of English, people will be less vulnerable to isolation and loneliness and can build their confidence to speak up for themselves.' (HM Government, 2018: 35)*

They argue that despite the immigration measures introduced by the government in 2013 (Home Office, 2013) which require anyone arriving in the UK from outside the EU to prove they possess an appropriate level of conversational English (B1 intermediate), there still remain many people in England who cannot speak English well or at all – in the region of 770,000 aged 16 years and older at the last Census (HM Government, 2018).

Who will pay for this? - ESOL funding

At the same time, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) funding from government was reduced by 50% between 2008 and 2015 (Runnymede, 2018) as part of wider funding cuts in education, health, social care etc as the 'austerity' measures of this government. This irony didn't escape Dame Louise Casey, the author of a Guardian editorial, who observes: '*When David Cameron announced that non-English speakers*

risked deportation, he had just cut £45m from the English language teaching budget.' (Casey, 2016).

In fact, since the withdrawal of automatic fee remission in 2007 funding for ESOL has been consistently squeezed and eligibility criteria tightened. Until August 2007 all ESOL courses were eligible for automatic fee remission, now only a select few categories of learners are eligible, namely, those in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit. Learners in other categories are expected to contribute to the cost of their courses (Foster & Bolton, 2017).

This reduction in funding was followed by a corresponding fall in participation. According to a Commons Library Briefing, participation in ESOL classes fell from almost 180,000 in 2009-10 to just over 100,000 in 2015-16 (Foster & Bolton, 2017).

The demand for ESOL classes, however, has remained unchanged. In the same Commons briefing the authors report results of a 2014 survey of ESOL providers carried out by the National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA) in which 80% of respondents said their institution had "…significant waiting lists of up to 1,000 students…" and 66% said that lack of funding was the main cause of this (Foster & Bolton, 2017). Elsewhere, Refugee Action noted that even when funding was made available for women in isolated communities, waiting lists of over six months were a commonplace (Refugee Action, 2017 in Runnymede, 2018).

Currently the majority of ESOL funding is offered by two governmental departments - the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The DfE funds the ESOL provision in Further Education through the Adult Education Budget (AEB) in the same way as other further education courses whilst the DCLG is responsible for Community ESOL provision. As at 2016, the FE sector receives £90 million in ESOL funding (Foster & Bolton, 2017) compared to around £2 million per year dispensed by the DCLG in the four years between 2012 -2016 (£8.45 million in total) (Robertson, 2017).

The DCLG funding was allocated to six consortia led projects. Despite the small size of the available funding (compared to the FE provision), the DCLG funded community provision which engaged 33,000 people over the first two years of running (AOC, 2016). This, however, was made possible with the help of hundreds of volunteers. The DCLG SpEC (Speaking English with Confidence) project alone, engaged 750 volunteers in the

development and running of informal English conversation clubs across 15 London boroughs (Crow, 2015). The use of volunteers to deliver ESOL classes is a contentious topic.

In an article, written by a Demos researcher Ian Wybron, he suggests that in order to ease the pressure on the ESOL system caused by insufficient funding we should involve volunteers, i.e. 'ordinary citizens with a good standard of English' in delivering ESOL provision and proposes three solutions:

1. Incorporating ESOL into the existing 'employer-supported volunteering agenda' where volunteers from large corporate organisations would deliver local community ESOL projects
2. Tapping-into the good-will of neighbours – using housing associations as a base for native speakers to support non-native speakers in learning English
3. Using university students with their 'flexible schedules' to deliver provision. (Wyborn, 2015 in NATECLA, 2015)

Aside from the fact that these 'creative solutions' suggest that demand can be met without an increase in investment, they also undermine the role of an ESOL teacher as a professional by suggesting that the only prerequisite one needs to have in order to teach English is a sufficient grasp of the English language. This implies that pretty much anyone can teach it.

In their response to this article NATECLA stated that whilst they value the contribution made by volunteers, volunteers cannot replace qualified and experienced ESOL teachers to deliver ESOL provision to refugees and migrants. They acknowledge that volunteers do play an important part in the provision of ESOL, but their role should be limited to providing teaching support and reaching out as befrienders or mentors for migrants in need. Importantly, they point out that *learners benefit most from structured courses taught by skilled professionals* (NATECLA, 2015).

This sentiment has been echoed by others. For example, Paul Offord, in his article aptly titled 'Leave ESOL to the experts', argues that rather than funding provision which is delivered by 'unpaid "small voluntary and community groups"', DCLG 'should leave it to the professionals at FE colleges, who have taught it for decades.' He argues that funds

should be pulled together under one department dedicated to education instead of being managed by two independent ones (Offord, 2017).

However, irrespective of one's position on the use of volunteers in ESOL classes, this debate itself is symptomatic of the underlying chronic underfunding of language provision in the UK. Ironically, this, as we have seen, appears to be the case despite the ongoing rhetoric of English language being essential for integration and for social mobility, which demonstrates that the current government certainly talks the talk but seems less willing to walk the walk.

A number of articles have been written making this point. Gordon Marsden (former shadow minister for Education) in an article in FE Week put it very eloquently noting that '*It's all very well the education secretary waxing lyrical about English as a second language, but without proper funding, migrants have no chance.'* (Marsden, 2018)

How do others do it? - Language provision in the EU

Naturally, the United Kingdom is not the only European country that provides language lessons for its migrants to aid their integration. Other European countries, too, facilitate a provision of language learning. And like the UK, most European countries make rights of residence contingent on one's language proficiency and one's knowledge of society (KOS). The European Commission in one of their communication documents on integration stated that: *'It is broadly agreed that the acquisition of language skills is critical for integration.'* (European Commission 2011:4 in Ros i Sole, 2014:57)

Researcher Cristina Ros i Sole, in her analysis of language learning and integration in the European context notes the following: '*increasingly, the learning of the national language has become a cornerstone of integration policy in the EU, and the knowledge of the 'host' language is seen as a barometer of migrants' integration in a particular society. Policies in a variety of European countries are making language tests and so called 'knowledge of society' a compulsory requirement to enter, settle or apply for citizenship, so that full rights and access to jobs, education and social life is closely linked to language proficiency.' (Ros i Sole, 2014: 57)*

A survey of language requirements in EU member states carried out by Language Policy Division provides further data that support this statement. It shows that increasingly, many countries now require migrants to demonstrate their language proficiency and KOS prior to entry into the host country. Although this is mostly the case in western European countries where the conditions prior to entry have gained significance. In contrast, as at 2010, none of the eastern European countries had a language proficiency requirement prior to entry (Extramiana & Van Avremaet, 2011). Where linguistic proficiency has to be demonstrated after arrival, migrants may be required to attend a language course. The majority of western European countries make this requirement compulsory. In most cases in western Europe (France, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Luxembourg, Greece), where the courses are compulsory, they do not attract a fee (Extramiana & Van Avremaet, 2011). Not all countries, however, are quite so generous. For example, in countries such as the Netherlands and Liechtenstein where there are no government-funded courses, migrants bear the cost of them (Extramiana & Van Avremaet, 2011).

It is indisputable that knowledge of the host language is key to integration and to a better life, but it also seems that some governments have made language their tool to manage migration. Moving the proverbial goalpost on the proficiency requirements allows governments to control who can come and/or settle in the country. For example, Professor Elana Shohamy has argued that '*[c]ontrary to what one might think, language testing is not being used to boost language learning; rather, it is being used as a gate-keeping mechanism, and some even argue these linguistic requirements are 'biased, discriminating and unattainable requirements'.' (Shohamy, 2009:45* in Ros i Sole, 2014:68)

Krumm and Plutzar (2008) argue that meaningful language learning experience should take into account the different circumstances, family situations and learning experiences of migrants on the one hand and the real needs and capacities of migrants to participate in the life of society on the other, rather than one level of proficiency. Language courses should reflect this diversity by being more differentiated in terms of the content and small size of groups. Preferably combined with the workplace and based in the learners' neighbourhoods (Krumm and Plutzar 2008).

Elsewhere, Vaughan Jones, the Chief Executive of Praxis, an organisation offering support and advice services to migrants and refugees in east London, makes a similar point arguing that we need to re-think how we empower newcomers to acquire a host

language. He points to a recent debate on the role of ESOL recognising the need for a balance between English as an economic and as a social tool. He believes that English teaching needs to enable people to form social connections with neighbours and to progress into and within the labour market (Jones, 2010). He concludes his argument by stating:

> *'English language provision is problematic. It is expensive and patchy. It continues to be delivered for the most part in conventional classroom situations, often in short courses and at times which do not easily cohere with the complicated lives of most new migrants. Those who juggle long hours, low pay, family duties and the bureaucracies attached to being migrant find it hard to manage the commitment needed for a course leading to high drop-out rates or limited achievement. Language is acquired in context and sitting in a class is not the most natural way to learn language. There is a need for a radical reassessment of how English is delivered and how we support the organic acquisition of English.' (Jones, 2010)*

Indeed, countries such as Ireland have been providing differentiated courses for different groups of people such as 'slow' learners with no or little formal education background, learners with an average number of years spent in school and those who have a long learning experience (Krumm and Plutzar 2008).

Generally, migrants may be required to study from 100 guided learning hours (GLH) to more than 600 GLH developing their linguistic competences in speaking, listening, reading and writing at levels from A1 (beginners) to B1 (intermediate) (Krumm & Plutzar 2008). However, the majority of mainstream language courses are often standardized and set in fairly formal contexts, e.g. further education colleges where, for efficiency reasons, groups may be large.

This gives further credence to the notion that language is a tool in the government's hands to control migrants and migration. Hogan-Brun and colleagues maintain that due to stricter conditions for people who want to apply for resident rights, proficiency in the 'national language' of the country has been formalised and more mechanisms (or one may say 'barriers') for testing have been introduced. They argue that to make language tests a requirement for entry to the UK or for permanent residence is coercive and socially exclusive (Hogan-Brun, et. al., 2009 in Ros i Sole, 2014:68).

Bringing it home - the local context

London, like many other parts of the United Kingdom, is characterised by income inequalities with extensive pockets of deprivation (Tinson, 2017). London is also a popular destination for migrants coming to the UK. In 2016 alone 156,000 migrants moved to London, the highest number in the country (ONS, 2017)

This somewhat explains the high demand for ESOL classes. This demand is further driven by a limited availability of funded provision caused by the funding cuts described above. A recent report by the Mayor of London states that: '*ESOL providers and practitioners have been faced with changes to funding, policy and practice, often responding at short notice. Reductions in funding to the Adult Education Budget have seen participation in ESOL learning fall between 2010 and 2016, though many providers report high levels of demand. Some new initiatives have been introduced in response to this, although the level of funding offered does not replace that which has been removed.' (Stevenson, et. al., 2017: 5)*

The charity that I work for and where this thesis is set works with disadvantaged individuals helping them improve their lives by providing them with support, skills and training necessary for them to move into employment or education. A large number of the participants have a low self-esteem and low confidence. Often, this is a result of insufficient language skills and/or long-term economic inactivity, for example, due to childcare, family commitments, illness, etc. The charity and its programmes are only possible thanks to a combination of government or EU funding and grants. This means that the programmes are free for eligible participants.

The ESOL classes in which this thesis is carried out are funded by a community grant. The project for which the grant was provided was developed specifically to offer English language learning opportunities to residents who due to their legal status or other personal circumstances miss out on mainstream ESOL provision at local colleges. There are only two principal Education and Skills Funding Agency providers in the area: the Borough Adult Community Learning and a local FE. Courses at both organisations are oversubscribed despite strict eligibility criteria.

The borough is also home to a dynamic informal ESOL provision, mostly in the form of conversation classes facilitated by a group of committed volunteers. In addition to providing opportunities for learners to practise their speaking skills, these classes are also very important in promoting community cohesion as they allow learners to mix with members from other communities, learn about their cultures and customs, challenging any prejudices they may have about them. However, they are no substitute for more formal, accredited provision to which they are a valuable stepping stone.

The charity grant-funded ESOL classes do provide an opportunity to study in a more formal environment. They are hosted by two primary schools who have provided the room for the classes to take place. The schools have promoted the classes among their parents with a view to improve parents' literacy skills and to promote and facilitate parental engagement both of which are seen as crucial in raising educational attainment (Gottfried, Fleming & Gottfried, 1998). Parental engagement has also been identified as an area for development in the school's recent Ofsted reports. As a result, the majority of the learners in these classes (although not exclusively) are stay-at-home mums.

Learners on these courses are often very motivated. They want to improve their language skills in order to gain meaningful employment, make new friends, be independent, have better access to the lives of their children. They perceive their current language competency as insufficient and therefore a barrier to achieving these goals.

They also understand that in order to improve they need to study in and out of the classroom. The courses offered by the charity are relatively short - sixty guided learning hours in duration. It is therefore essential that learners study outside of the class. However, there is an over-reliance on the teacher and the classes to improve their skills with the teacher often being seen as the main source of motivation (e.g. Dornyei, 2001). This contact in itself is not enough for learners to make sufficient progress in areas such as language learning/acquisition.

Here, too, Jones makes a valid point stating that language provision should empower and promote agency rather than 'foster dependency': '*A positive approach to the facilitation of settlement for new migrants will ensure that there is spectrum of communication support available. This net of provision should never foster dependency but enable every individual and each distinctive community to be self-reliant and empowered to participate as fully as they are able and desire. Communication support is about removing barriers*

rather than creating new ones. It is a spectrum from ongoing practical and accessible support for the most vulnerable, to the provision of resources for self-directed learning.' (Jones, 2010)

Providing homework activities is one way a teacher can ensure that classroom learning is extended beyond the classroom. Setting weekly tests is another (one that works surprisingly well with adult learners, for example, see Lewandowski, 2008). Such strategies may work in the short term, however, in themselves, they do not promote independence as learners continue to rely on the teacher to motivate them and to organise their learning for them. We can also promote learner independence within the classroom through classroom management techniques, e.g. by encouraging learners to self-check and peer check before asking the teacher, providing task-based learning which requires cooperation among learners, etc. Such techniques not only reduce reliance on the teacher but also foster a sense of agency and build confidence.

Learner independence is a significant aspect of practice that many teachers are taught about on teacher training courses and then promote in their classrooms (Mellar, 2007). Ability to direct learning independently of the teacher allows learners to create more practice opportunities and is considered essential to successful learning (e.g. Richards, 2015). This is particularly important for migrant ESOL learners in the UK.

It is a sad irony that these learners, despite living in an English-speaking country far from being immersed in the language, often find themselves isolated from a wider linguistic community and have very few opportunities to use or practise their language skills. This is particularly pertinent to students who are unemployed such as, for example, the aforementioned stay-at-home mothers. However, even being in employment does not always guarantee opportunities to use English at work. Migrants working in factories, warehouses or construction sites often find themselves working alongside people who speak their own or similar language and therefore do not have to use English much to carry out their tasks. A case in point is an evening class I delivered recently at a warehouse in west London. The class comprised entirely Eastern European students. When quizzed about their English needs at work they replied that at their level they did not have to use English much at all. They received their instructions and training (including Health and Safety) from a supervisor who spoke their language and they used a combination of Polish and Russian to communicate with each other. They attended the

class because they felt they needed to learn English in order to find a better job or get a promotion.

Encouraging learners to think independently and creatively about using and practising their language skills outside of the classroom would go some way towards addressing not only the issue of greater progress in language learning but also that of community cohesion and integration. Creating, recognising and seizing opportunities to learn and to practise language skills is key to successful language learning. The strategies mentioned above are a start but are either teacher directed or aimed at modifying in-classroom behaviour. However, I feel that more is required to ensure that learners develop self-directed out-of-classroom learning behaviour. A strategy that would give teachers more certainty that learners will direct their learning more autonomously outside of the classroom.

ILP, what is it good for?

There is already a document which is used by many organisations up and down the country - an Individual Learning Plan (ILP). ILPs give learners and teachers an opportunity to identify and discuss individual 'areas for development' for each learner. These can then be recorded as actionable SMART goals, i.e. they have to be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timebound. Learner progress against these goals is then reviewed on a regular basis. As we will see later the underlying principles of ILPs are sound. The guidelines for teachers on how to set those learning goals stipulate that goals should not be imposed but rather negotiated. And the document itself should be

retained by the learner. This is to ensure that learners can remind themselves of their goals and take ownership of them[2].

In reality, ILPs are often seen as an administrative burden placed on teachers many of whom work part time or on an hourly basis and do not have the time to complete them in a meaningful way (Baynham, et. al. 2007). Far from simply recording student progress, ILPs can be confusing and cause both students and tutors stress (Hamilton, 2009). Furthermore, ILPs are not seen as part of the 'real' work of literacy teaching and learning and are sometimes felt to detract from it (Hamilton, 2009, Baynham, et.al. 2007).

In effect they have become a box ticking task that has to be done in order to comply with funding requirements (Hamilton, 2009). This can mean that the 'negotiated' goals are often generic, taken from a list created to save time. They become meaningless as learners are asked to agree them by signing the document without fully understanding the significance of the document (Hamilton, 2009, Baynham, et.al. 2007).

Rarely are learners allowed to retain the document, either. The ILP has become a commodity inseparably linked to the funders' list of outputs and outcomes, each with an assigned price. Such is the monetary value of this humble document that organisations dare not let learners keep a copy for fear of the document becoming misplaced or lost. Instead, it is safely filed away along with other 'precious' documents.

Another flaw of ILPs is that the objectives set for learners in ESOL classes are fairly linear and tend to focus only on aspects of the language covered in the scheme of work which are subsequently evidenced by learners completing classroom-based tasks. I would argue that whilst it is important to link objectives to the coursework to measure and

[2] It is worth noting that with a few exceptions, despite their widespread use, there is very little in the literature about the use of ILPs in ESOL contexts or their effectiveness. The most comprehensive study of the use of ILPs by ESOL teachers was carried out by and Mary Hamilton (2009) which is quoted throughout this thesis. Teachers' attitudes to ILPs were also explored by Mike Baynham and colleagues in their 2007 report on effective teaching of ESOL.

monitor progress, it is also important that, just like language which exists beyond the classroom, goals too should extend beyond it. Neither should they necessarily be linked or limited to practising and mastering discrete linguistic items. These goals should focus on maximising language use and on practising it in its 'natural environment' where learners challenge themselves to step outside of their comfort zones.

However, the goal setting methodology that underpins Individual Learning Plans can help learners become more independent and spend more time practising their language skills through self-directed study (e.g. Locke and Latham, 1990).

This thesis proposes to take an alternative look at Individual Learning Plans (ILP) with the view to reclaiming the positive aspects of goal setting. It is research into ways that put the learner at the heart of goal setting, where goals are set, monitored and reviewed collaboratively and in turn the goal setting activity becomes an opportunity for learners to share learning ideas. It is hoped that this will promote autonomy and the development of positive learning habits through the application of self-regulating learning strategies. More specifically, the research questions this study hopes to answer are reiterated below:

- To what extent can goal setting lead to an increased sense of agency and autonomy in ESOL learners?
- To what extent can goal setting help to motivate ESOL learners to practise language skills in their own time through self-directed study?
- To what extent can setting own goals increase the time English is used outside of the class?
- To what extent can goal setting help ESOL learners improve their language skills as specified in their course goals?

Chapter 2 (literature review) - A journey through the 'known knowns'

Whatever the mind of man can conceive and believe, it can achieve.

Napoleon Hill

Introduction

The previous chapter was an opportunity to explore the wider context of migration, integration and public policy in which this study is situated. It was also a chance to introduce the problem as well as its potential solution, namely, insufficient language input in the class and self-directed learning outside the classroom in which goal setting can play an important part, respectively. The aim of this chapter is to develop the topic of setting goals by placing it in the context of human learning and behaviour. Naturally, it is only prudent to note that the studies included in this review represent only a modest fraction of the vast body of knowledge accumulated on this subject. They are, however, pertinent to the design of this study. They also allow me to deepen my understanding of the relevant research and debates on this subject, inform my future analysis and discussion of the findings, and, hopefully, allow me to make a small contribution to the said body of knowledge. So, here is what we know.

"Lower than the angels"

The end of the 60s and beginning of the 70s saw a production of two seminal TV programmes – Civilization presented by Kenneth Clark and The Ascent of Man presented by Jacob Bronowski. Both programmes, although thematically different (the history of Western art and the history of Science respectively), were in essence about the same thing, namely, human ingenuity and creativity. In The Ascent of Man Bronowski considered 'science' in a much broader sense - one which encompassed man's endeavour to comprehend and manipulate the natural world.

Bronowski's depiction of Man[3] would have been at odds with Behaviourism - the dominant field of psychology of the day. Bronowski's Man was a tool maker, a creator, an artist, a landscape shaper, capable of planning and creativity, imagination and purposefulness. A creature like no other whose '*imagination, his reason, his emotional subtlety and toughness, make it possible for him not to accept the environment but to change it.' (Bronowski, 1973:20)*

Behaviourism places humans firmly within the animal kingdom, whereas for Bronowski Man with his unique faculties sat in a sweet mystical spot somewhere between animals and the angels.

Behaviourists argue that behaviour is learnt - driven by our responses to stimuli in the environment, i.e. outside of the person, and largely in the form of rewards or punishments and it is only in this context that it can be explained (McLeod, 2017). Much like other animals whose behaviour evolved to ensure their survival, humans, too, have had to adapt to their environment in order to successfully pass on their progeny which meant avoiding predation, obtaining sustenance and mating. As such, all human behaviour could broadly be explained in terms of attaining these goals.

This is not to say that explaining human behaviour is simple. Our interaction with the environment is a dynamic process. Learning alters our perception of the environment and with it our interpretation of the incoming stimuli which, in turn, affects the way we interact and behave. This process generates a range of complex behaviours. Some selfish such as deceit and prevarication, others selfless and altruistic such as kindness. However, no matter how complex the human behaviour, behaviourists argue that at a fundamental level there is no distinction between human and animal behaviour (McLeod, 2017). This was an important assertion because it made it possible for human behaviour to be studied empirically which would make psychology a natural science. Where internal motives such as the need for achievement were proposed, they were promptly asserted to be

[3] Note that I use Man here the way Bronowski would have used it - in a non-gendered, generic way referring to the species. The subsequent pronouns are kept masculine for stylistic purposes.

subconscious or physiological (e.g. McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953 in Locke & Latham 2002). Behaviourists generally agreed that conscious introspection was not a valid method of understanding human motivation making the possibility of studying the conscious regulation of action unworthy of any serious pursuit (Locke & Latham 2002).

I have borrowed the title of this section from the first chapter of The Ascent of Man. The chapter is a powerful essay on Man's genesis and his place in the world which, I felt, was pertinent here.

This thesis, too, although placed in a small patch of London and with a specific focus on goal setting and motivation, has much wider implications. Ultimately, it is a study about making a place a home. About our unique ability to adapt to a new environment and to thrive in it. It is a study about who we are and what we can become. It is about our potential and our ability to fulfil it. It is about the struggles we face and overcome.

Behaviourists' ideas described above would not have rested well with Bronowski who opens the chapter with the following words:

> *'Man is a singular creature. He has a set of gifts which make him unique among the animals: so that, unlike them, he is not a figure in the landscape - he is a shaper of the landscape. In body and in mind he is the explorer of nature, the ubiquitous animal, who did not find but has made his home in every continent.' (Bronowski, 1973:19)*

Bronowski's views were not isolated, either. In the world of psychology, too, the behaviourists' status quo was about to be challenged. In the late 60s a group of psychologists, including Richard Ryan, Edwin A. Locke and Gary P. Latham, started to challenge the dominance of behaviourists in psychology. They argued that humans had more control over their behaviour than being mindlessly driven by external stimuli. Ryan (1970) himself stated that *'it seems a simple fact that human behavior is affected by conscious purposes, plans, intentions, tasks and the like'* (in Locke & Latham 2002:705). Steven Pinker, a Harvard psycholinguist, in his critical book 'How the Mind Works' defines intelligence as 'the ability to attain goals in the face of obstacles by means of decisions based on rational (truth-obeying) rules' (Pinker, 1997:61) Intelligence, he continues referring to the work of two computer scientists - Allen Newell and Herbert Simon, *'consists of specifying a goal, assessing the current situation to see how it differs from the goal, and applying a set of operations that reduce the difference.'* (1997:61) This requires

planning, foresight and intentionality which Behaviourism simply does not satisfactorily explain. Pinker illustrates this nicely by asking: “Why did Sally run out of the building?” To which question he gives several possible scenarios describing the stimuli to which she may have responded but also pointing out that none of these stimuli would necessarily have sent her out either. For example, Sally may have left because she saw smoke, but perhaps she left in response to a phone call telling her that the building was on fire, or to the sight of arriving fire engines, or to the sound of a fire alarm. Conversely, she would not have left if the smoke was from ‘an English muffin in a toaster’ or if ‘the phone call was from a friend practicing [sic] lines for a play’ and so on and so forth. (Pinker, 1997).

An analogous example is given by Bronowski who describes a runner taking off at the sound of a starting gun. The runner’s reactions are the same as the flight of a gazelle (*The heartbeat goes up; when he sprints at top speed the heart is pumping five times as much blood as normal, and ninety percent of it is for the muscles*), except the runner is not in flight, he is experiencing exaltation rather than fear: *The runner is like a child at play; his actions are an adventure in freedom, and the only purpose of his breathless chemistry was to explore the limits of his own strength.* (Bronowski, 1973:30)

In contrast, it has been observed (e.g. Seyfarth, et. al. 1980) that vervet monkeys have three distinct warning calls for leopards, eagles and snakes to which they respond in distinct ways. For example, when on the ground they will look up and run into trees on hearing a call signifying a leopard, or they will look up and run for cover in response to a call for eagle. Like the gazelle in the example above, their responses are wired and instinctive. They will respond in the same way each time they hear these calls, regardless of whether or not the threat exists. What these examples demonstrate is that, unlike animals who instinctively and uncritically respond to natural or learnt stimuli, humans have the capacity to pause and interpret the stimuli and take the most appropriate course of action in the given circumstances. Man’s ingenuity is not limited to interpreting stimuli, either - a point made cogently (if not poetically!) by Bronowski himself:

> *“Man is distinguished from other animals by his imaginative gifts. He makes plans, inventions, discoveries, by putting different talents together; and his discoveries become more subtle and penetrating, as he learns to combine his talents in more complex and intimate ways. So the great discoveries of different ages and different cultures, in technique, in science, in arts express in their progression a richer and*

more intricate conjunction of human faculties, an ascending trellis of his gifts." (Bronowski, 1973:20)

This ability to learn and develop complex new skills is what physicist, Max Tegmark, refers to as Life 2.0 (Tegmark, 2017). Tegmark, in his thought-provoking book, 'Life 3.0', looks at the evolution of life on earth which he describes in three steps or as three 'versions' of life, i.e. version 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0.

Life 1.0 - biological evolution - which applies to most life on earth where any adaptations are a result of natural selection. Life 1.0 organisms are unable to change their 'hardware' (make physical changes) or 'software' (cognitive abilities) during their lifetimes. Both are determined by DNA and change through evolution over many generations (Tegmark, 2017). Humans, in contrast, are examples of Life 2.0 who have undergone cultural evolution. Human hardware is evolved but our software is largely designed. What this means is that whilst we cannot change our bodies, we can and do learn anything we want or need. Tegmark argues that this ability to design its software enables Life 2.0 to be not only smarter than Life 1.0 but also more flexible (2017). It also makes humans much more adaptable and has enabled us to occupy every part of the planet and thrive in most ecological niches. From the heat of the tropics to the arctic chill. No other animal has been capable of repeating this feat. Tegmark does point out that the lines between the stages can get fuzzy. Some animals are after all capable of some learning, e.g. mice taught to run a maze could be classified as Life 1.1. But their skills and knowledge die with them and do not get passed on to the next generation (2017).

Finally, Life 3.0 is an outcome of technological evolution. It is able to dramatically redesign both its hardware and software (Tegmark, 2017). As it is, Life 3.0 does not exist on the planet yet but Tegmark hypothesises that with the current technological advances, it could, in theory, come to be. In the book, Tegmark goes into the implications of the existence of Life 3.0 for us humans and describes various scenarios not all of which end well for us. Ironically, should this ever happen, it will only be as the result of the curiosity, creativity and ingenuity that Bronowski spoke so eloquently of, making us the victims of our own success!

“The reports of Behaviourism death are greatly exaggerated”

Tegmark’s description of Life 2.0 is in line with Bronowski’s depiction of Man - creative, adaptable and capable of creating his own destiny and is largely at odds with Behaviourism. However, behaviourists may still have the last word. My assertion above that *humans unlike animals, who instinctively and uncritically respond to natural or learnt stimuli, have the capacity to pause and interpret the stimuli and take the most appropriate course of action in the given circumstances* should be qualified to: ***in addition to*** *responding uncritically and instinctively to stimuli, humans* ***also*** *have the capacity to pause and interpret them before deciding on a course of action.* Because behaviourists may not have been entirely wrong. Much of our behaviour is indeed driven by cues in the environment to which we subconsciously respond. We have after all evolved from Life 1.0 and our cognitive capacities are an ‘upgrade’ on, rather than a replacement of, the more instinctive behaviours[4]. Our Life 2.0 abilities also come at a price (metabolically speaking). Our willpower is a limited resource that gets depleted through cognitively demanding tasks such as decision making (e.g. Steel, et. al. 2018); however, analysing every action and decision consciously would not only be exhausting but also paralyzing if not downright dangerous. In reality the majority of our behaviours and responses are

[4] At this point in the discussion it’s important to acknowledge Posthumanism - a philosophy that emerged over the late 20th century which aims to redefine what it means to be human. Posthumanist theory claims to offer a new epistemology that is not anthropocentric. It calls into question the separation and elevation of man over the natural world and seeks to undermine the traditional boundaries between the human, the animal, and the technological (Bolter, 2016). This has implications for philosophy, science, technology science, to name but a few. For example, in his article on this subject, author Jay David Bolter, reminds us that *‘Cartesian tradition of dualism insisted that the essence of the human was cognition and that animals were merely highly intricate machines, part of the material world over against the world of the mind.’* (2016: 3) This view received a series of challenges arising mainly from the Darwinian revolution (ibid). Bolter also notes that ‘mounting complications of the paradigm of positivist science have led to an increased willingness to emphasize continuity rather than separateness in the biological world’ (2016: 3) This is also a view that is consistent with my own thinking on this subject.

rapid and automatic. In Pinker's example above, deliberating on whether or not to flee the building in the presence of smoke could prove fatal.

According to cognitive scientists (e.g. Stanovich and West, 2000 or Kahneman, 2011) there are two largely autonomous reasoning systems: system 1 and system 2.

System 1 is intuitive, automatic, unconscious, and effortless which answers questions quickly through associations and heuristics. System 1 relies on habitual practices and impulses. It sees the world as more predictable and coherent than it really is. It is also largely reminiscent of behaviourism. The behaviours driven by System 1 are considered to be older in evolutionary terms and shared with other animals. It evolved to protect our ancestors from the dangers of predation. They relied on their senses honed by experience to respond quickly and instinctively to anything lurking in the bushes that might threaten their survival (Slovic & Zionts, 2012). System 1 is also responsible for heuristics and cognitive biases such as availability bias, anchoring, affect, etc which allow us to make decisions quickly based on cues which we may not be aware of. So, for example, we may overestimate the occurrence of crime based on news reports, assign a value to a bottle of wine based on a random number or suddenly and inexplicably change our mood. They can be helpful in many situations but may also lead to poor or irrational decisions.

System 1 is in charge when we are driving on a familiar route, e.g. home or to work. We can be engaged in a conversation or daydreaming and not notice how we got to our destination unless there was a problem on the route and we had to take a detour. At this point System 2 takes over. System 2 is thought of as being more recent in evolutionary terms. It captures complex cognitive processes unmatched in the animal kingdom which gave modern humans cognitive advantages for survival over other hominids, relative to language, higher processing and new forms of thinking (Evans, 2003 in de Castro Bellini-Leite, 2013). System 2 is conscious, slow, controlled, deliberate, effortful, statistical, suspicious, and lazy (costly to use) (Shleifer, 2012). Our perception of ourselves as conscious, rational beings who are in charge of their own actions and decisions is epitomic of System 2.

System 2 monitors the actions driven by System 1 and is called on when there is a discrepancy between our beliefs about how the world works and the reality we happen to be facing. It allows us to question and doubt things, to problem solve and make deliberate

choices; it monitors and controls our behaviour by mobilizing effort and attention when required.

Goal setting is reliant on the processes described in System 2. It requires intentionality, planning and foresight. However, once set or 'acquired reflectively through System 2, goals can, through repeated activation, be installed into rigid implicit processing mechanisms—a kind of automation of thought.' (Stanovich, 2004 in Evans, 2008) (I will discuss the benefits of the automation of actions in the section about habit formation). This too is uncannily reminiscent of behaviourism.

SMART is the way...

When Edwin A. Locke and Gary P. Latham launched their research into goal setting, they admitted that their research did not focus on goals as discrete intentions to take specific actions, e.g. to apply to a graduate school, to get a medical examination (Locke & Latham, 2002).

Instead, as industrial-organisational psychologists, they were primarily concerned with performance on work related tasks with the relationship between conscious performance goals and level of task performance as their primary focus (Locke & Latham, 2002). However, their research did eventually contribute to the now famous SMART goal methodology which has been adopted widely throughout sectors and industries from business to education.

Essentially, Locke and Latham argue that for goals to be effective, their difficulty should be within one's ability: *"We found a positive, linear function in that the highest or most difficult goals produced the highest levels of effort and performance. (...) Performance levelled off or decreased only when the limits of ability were reached or when commitment to a highly difficult goal lapsed."* (Locke & Latham, 2002: 706). Goals should also be specific - simply exhorting one to do their best is unlikely to lead to the same performance. This is because *"goal specificity reduces variation in performance by reducing the ambiguity about what is to be attained"* (Locke & Latham, 2002: 706). Their research suggests that articulating specific goals can boost performance typically by 15%. (Locke & Latham, 2002)

The reasons why goals work, they argue, are fourfold. One, goals direct attention and effort. Setting a goal promotes behaviours that will accomplish the task and thus minimizes distractions. Two, goals regulate effort expenditure. They have an energizing function with high goals leading to greater effort than low goals. Three, goals encourage persistence until the task is accomplished. This is particularly true when one has control over the time they can spend on a task. We also tend to work faster and more intensely for a short period and vice versa. Four, goals promote the search for relevant action plans. In order to achieve a goal, one seeks out different ways to achieve it. (Locke & Latham, 2002)

The acronym 'SMART' is a useful mnemonic device which reminds us of the main steps we should follow when setting goals. As such it stands for:

- **Specific**: goals should be well defined so that learners know exactly the intended outcome for the goal.
- **Measurable**: Writing a goal that is measurable is essential. A goal that is measurable means that data can be taken on the goal to provide evidence of it being met or not met.
- **Achievable**: Goals for learners should also be achievable. This means that the goal will challenge the student, so that it is worthwhile to work on, but that it is also a realistic task for the student to accomplish.
- **Relevant**: Learners will be more inclined to complete an action which is relevant to their lives or interests.
- **Timebound**: A goal should always indicate a timed deadline for its outcome.

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The acronym was first coined by George T. Doran in a 1981 article aptly titled "There's a S.M.A.R.T. way to write management's goals and objectives" (Doran, 1981). Doran expressed the first, cogent way to define, measure and ultimately achieve goals. Following the five criteria in SMART brings a level of structure to goal setting. It creates a clear and verifiable plan towards an objective with steps and milestones as well as the likelihood of its accomplishment.

… or is it?

However, it has been noted (e.g. Ordóñez, et. al., 2008) that setting SMART goals may hide a darker side. For one, goals which are too specific may narrow our focus at the expense of other, equally important, aspects of learning. For instance, someone with a goal to improve their grammar may do so at the expense of vocabulary or content in general. In some cases, such specific focus may result in 'inattentional blindness' - a phenomenon cleverly, if not somewhat spookily, demonstrated in an experiment carried out by two Harvard researchers Daniel J Simons and Christopher F Chabris (1999 in Ordóñez, et. al. 2008).

In their experiment, now known as 'the invisible gorilla', Simons and Chabris asked participants to watch a video of a staged basketball game and count the number of passes among players in white shirts. This focus on players in white shirts makes participants unconsciously block out the remaining black shirt wearing players. Moreover, most participants also fail to notice when a man wearing a black gorilla suit walks into the middle of the screen, pounds his chest, and walks off screen. Their findings suggest that we perceive and remember only those objects and details that receive focused attention.

Ordóñez and her colleagues also argue that challenging goals may not be the panacea they are made out to be. Challenging goals may boost performance but this may not always be done with integrity. Goals which are too challenging may promote risk taking and unethical behaviour. Both behaviours have contributed to the eventual downfall of a number of large companies as we saw in the financial crisis of 2008. Ordóñez et. al describe the collapse of Continental Illinois Bank where staff trying to fulfil their chairman's ambition to match the lending to that of other banks at the time changed their lending behaviour from conservative corporate financing towards aggressive pursuit of borrowers. This meant investing in very risky loans which eventually led to the government bail out of the bank. Other examples of unethical behaviour caused by challenging goals listed in the paper include:

- Charging customers for unnecessary repairs in order to meet specific, challenging goals;

- Shipping bricks to customers instead of disk drives to meet shipping targets, and...
- Falsifying financial statements to meet earnings goals (Ordóñez et. al, 2008)

Ordóñez and her colleagues do not specifically describe the implications of setting challenging goals for education, however, one can easily imagine an analogous situation in a classroom setting where teachers motivated by challenging goals resort to falsifying test results in order to meet their targets. They may also become demotivated and despondent if they often miss unrealistic targets.

Performance challenged

To this end Ordóñez cautions against setting performance goals which she argues inhibit learning by focusing effort too narrowly. This may be done at the expense of creativity needed in more complex tasks which demand learners to consider multiple options to solve them (Ordóñez et. al. 2008). She concludes with a warning:

> *"Rather than dispensing goal setting as a benign, over-the-counter treatment for motivation, managers and scholars need to conceptualize goal setting as a prescription-strength medication that requires careful dosing, consideration of harmful side effects, and close supervision." (2008:19)*

Carol Dweck, a Stanford professor, who has extensively researched goal orientation, proposed that there are two kinds of achievement goals - a learning/mastery goal and a performance goal where individuals are concerned with either gaining competence in the acquisition of new skills or knowledge (former) or with the goal of gaining approval from peers and teachers (latter) (1986). Or to put it simply, the distinction is therefore between improving one's ability and proving it.

Although Dweck does not claim that setting performance goals leads to a subpar academic attainment compared to learning goals, she does argue that performance goals affect one's sense of agency and promote a helpless response when faced with a setback. In contrast, learning goals facilitate a search for solutions and thus have a greater educational value:

> *"Within a performance goal, individuals are concerned with measuring their ability and with answering the question, Is my ability adequate or inadequate? Within such a framework, outcomes will be a chief source of information relevant to this concern and thus failure outcomes may readily elicit the helpless attribution that ability is inadequate. In contrast, learning goals create a concern with increasing one's ability and extending one's mastery and would lead individuals to pose the question, What is the best way to increase my ability or achieve mastery? Here, then, outcomes would provide information about whether one is pursuing an optimal course and, if not, what else might be necessary. Failure would simply mean that the current strategy may be insufficient to the task and may require upgrading or revision. The self-instructions and self-monitoring of the mastery-oriented children can therefore be seen as a direct implementation of this information in pursuit of future goal success. Thus the attributions of the helpless children and the self-instructions of the mastery-oriented children in response to failure may be viewed as natural outgrowths of their goals." (Dweck and Leggett, 1988:260)*

Locke and Latham, too, endorse the use of learning rather than performance goals which they contend are superior on tasks that are complex for people (2002). This, they argue, could be because complex performance goals could be anxiety inducing:

> *"When people are confronted with a task that is complex for them, urging them to do their best sometimes leads to better strategies (Earley, Connolly, & Ekegren, 1989) than setting a specific difficult performance goal. This is because a performance goal can make people so anxious to succeed that they scramble to discover strategies in an unsystematic way and fail to learn what is effective. This can create evaluative pressure and performance anxiety. The antidote is to set specific challenging learning goals, such as to discover a certain number of different strategies to master the task (Seijts & G. P. Latham, 2001; Winters & Latham, 1996)." (Locke and Latham, 2002: 707)*

Although not everyone agrees that goals should be merely achievable either. A recent Forbes article suggests that people who set achievable and realistic goals are less likely to enjoy their jobs (Murphy, 2017). The author of this article surveyed 5 thousand individuals, the majority (about 66%) confirmed that they set SMART goals. Around 40% also responded that they set goals that could be described as difficult or audacious.

However, when followed up with a question relating to their job satisfaction only 29% of those who set SMART goals said that they loved their jobs compared to 40% of those who set audacious goals. Murphy seems to suggest that people are more fulfilled and successful in their jobs when they are challenged. However, a closer look at the findings paints a less convincing picture. Whilst it is true that 'only' 29% of the SMART goal respondents said that they 'loved' their job, 45% also said that they 'liked' it which means that a total of 74% responded affirmatively to this question (albeit to varying degrees). For the audacious goal setters that total was 77% which is only marginally more than the SMART goal setters. Perhaps interestingly, more people (8%) disliked or hated audacious goals compared to SMART goals (6%) which seems to confirm the anxiety inducing claim above.

Getting emotional

However, audacious performance goals are not the only goals that may stir up emotional responses. It appears that the goals we set have an impact on how we feel and how we feel about them determines whether or not we are successful at attaining them. In fact, there appear to be at least five ways in which goals affect our wellbeing (Cooper, 2018). For example, merely being aware of having a goal that is meaningful and important can have a profound effect on our wellbeing. Indeed, it has been shown that 'positive affect is just as strongly related to having important goals as it is to the attainment of these goals' (Emmons and Diener 1986, p. 315 in Cooper, 2018). Our emotional responses to goals will also depend on whether or not we feel a goal is attainable, (i.e. people feel more positive about goals they feel are attainable), whether we think we are making sufficient progress towards it, at a decent rate; and finally, on whether or not we achieve it (Cooper, 2018).

How we frame the goal will also determine how we feel about it and our success in attaining it. For example, a goal can be framed in two quite different ways. We may engage in an activity in order to avoid an undesirable future, e.g. I want to do well on the test or else my parents will be disappointed in me (avoidance goal), or in order to attain a more positive/desirable outcome, e.g. I want to do well on the test to show to myself and others what I've learnt (approach goal).

In other words, avoidance goals are focused on a negative, undesirable outcome or state and regulation entails trying to move or stay away from the outcome or state. By contrast, approach goals are focused on a positive, desirable outcome or state and regulation entails trying to move toward or maintain the outcome or state (Elliot & Church, 2002, p. 244 in Cooper, 2018:6).

The negative effect of avoidance goals has been shown to be compounded when coupled with performance goals, e.g. where a student wants to avoid appearing inept (Baranik, et. al. 2010). Performance-avoidance goals have consistently been found to induce debilitative anxiety and thus have detrimental effect on academic performance (Tyson, et. al. 2009). Tyson and colleagues (2009) argue that '*the endorsement of a performance-avoidance orientation is associated with lower levels of achievement. In addition, because one of the key goals is to avoid looking incompetent or avoid failure (rather than achieve success), it is associated with disengagement from academic tasks, shallow processing, poor retention of information, as well as with performance decrements.' (2009: 333)*

Performance-avoidance goals orientation is one of three achievement goal orientations proposed by researchers. The other two being performance-approach and mastery-approach goals. Both performance-avoidance goals and mastery-approach goals have been shown to be debilitative for performance by inducing anxiety or facilitative for performance by generating positive affect respectively (Tyson, et. al. 2009). The situation is not quite so clear-cut when it comes to performance-approach goals. As we have seen above, performance goals have been shown to make people anxious and are generally detrimental to learning (Dweck and Leggett, 1988). However, unlike performance-avoidance goals, the effect of performance-approach goals can be somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, they can be motivating by evoking positive emotions such as hope for success. On the other, much like performance goals, they can cause anxiety undermining the overall performance on the task (Tyson, et. al. 2009).

When it comes to performance-approach goals, regulation of emotions, it seems, may be the key to whether they exert positive or negative effects on performance (Pekrun and Stephens, 2009).

Don’t stress!

The links between emotions and learning were also explored in the field of language acquisition. Most notably, Stephen Krashen, a linguist and educational psychologist, posited that learners’ ability to acquire a language is constrained if they are experiencing negative emotions such as stress, embarrassment or anxiety (Krashen, 1982). Building on the work of Dulay and Burt who referred to this phenomenon as "affective filter", Krashen argued that undesirable emotions such as self-doubt, anxiety, certain inhibitions, etc. interfere with the process of acquiring a language acting as a filter that limits the amount of input the listener is able to understand. To this end, Krashen suggests that *‘[t]he effective language teacher is someone who can provide input and help make it comprehensible in a low anxiety situation.’* (Krashen, 1982:32)

One of the criticisms at the time was that this theory was not testable. However, thanks to the latest developments in neuroscience and improved neuroimaging techniques, scientists have been able to point to a possible culprit - the amygdala. Amygdala is part of the limbic system: a part of the brain that deals with three key functions, such as emotions, memories and arousal. It plays a key role in emotional processing. It also has an activating effect on our stress response system: the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis (Barry, et. al. 2017).

Amygdala is constantly on the lookout for threats and opportunities, mediating influences of emotional arousal and stress on learning and memory (McGaugh, et. al. 2002). It can enhance memory and learning or hinder them depending on the emotional state we are in (McGough, et. al. 2002) or the level of arousal (Lindau, et. al. 2016). Too high and we are too stressed to learn and focus. Too low and we are too bored to assimilate information.

Generally, however, stress has an adverse effect on learning and chronic stress, in particular*, ‘may have more widespread implications for cognition, by causing a cumulative and enduring overload of hippocampus* [the organ associated with long-term memory formation]*, with implications for its functioning and morphology. When the stress is chronic, the effects for encoding and retrieval are reported to be negative.’* (Lindau, et. al. 2016: 157)

This may lend support to Krashen's 'affective filter' hypothesis but could also explain why performance goals, both approach and avoidance, have such effect on learning. It seems that by anticipating future successes or failure we put ourselves in a state of heightened emotional arousal which, in the case of stress and anxiety, may lead to a release of cortisol and has an impact on hippocampal function. This impairs cognitive function and affects memory formation (Lindau, et. al. 2016).

However, stress is not the only emotion that affects learning. All emotions, both positive and negative, have an impact when they are not directly related to the learning task (Pekrun & Stephens, 2009). This is because anything that has our focus distracts from other things. Ultimately, we have a limited capacity of how much information we can process at any given time. Any new task or action that we have to perform in addition to what we are doing already will require us to commit new cognitive resources to it increasing the cognitive load (i.e. the effort used in the working memory). Emotions such as anxiety have been shown to increase cognitive load. In one study, foreign language students performed worse on a listening task when anxious, leading the researchers to conclude that learners who experience more anxiety incur a heavier cognitive load and receive lower test scores (Chen & Chang, 2009).

Similar results have been found in relation to mathematics (Ashcraft & Kirk, 2001; Beilock & Ramirez, 2011, Ramirez, et. al. 2013), a subject which often fills our hearts with dread (Strauss, 2014). For many students maths is a subject where the mere prospect of doing a test elicits a range of psychosomatic responses, including increase in heart rate and cortisol, worrying thoughts, etc (Beilock & Ramirez, 2011). As with the Chen and Chang study above, this appears to inhibit cognitive processing through its effect on working memory, as attention is diverted towards internal worries and intrusive thoughts (Ashcraft & Kirk, 2001).

By the same token, intruding thoughts generated by performance avoidance goals (e.g. *must do well on a test in order not to disappoint my parents*) will reduce concentration and distract away from the task by focusing our attention on the object of the emotion.

But this fear of failure may also be the reason why we delay engagement in an activity such revising or learning in the first place. Fear of failure, along with evaluation threat and perfectionism, is one of the most common reasons for procrastination (Pychyl, 2013).

Don’t do today what can be done tomorrow?

Contrary to the common belief that procrastination is caused by weak willpower, laziness or weak time management, psychologists are now discovering that it could, in fact, be a coping mechanism - a way to avoid emotionally unpleasant tasks (Steel, 2007). Procrastination, they argue, allows us to distract ourselves from these emotions by doing something else instead, bringing a temporary mood boost (Locke, 2016).

Piers Steel, the Distinguished Research Chair at the University of Calgary and one of the world’s foremost researchers of motivation and procrastination, argues that procrastination is an irrational behaviour where we voluntarily delay an intended course of action fully aware that we might be worse off for it (Steel, 2007). He has no qualms stating that procrastination is a form of self-regulation failure (or as he puts it: ‘quintessential’ self-regulation failure) that favours our present self as a form of short-term mood repair (Steel, 2007). According to Timothy Pychyl, a procrastination researcher at Carleton University and the author of ‘Solving the Procrastination Puzzle’, the main reason why we fail to self-regulate is because we ‘give in to feel good’ (2013). ‘When we give in to feel good, we give in to impulsive urges’, (Pychyl 2013). This is often done at the expense of our future self who must complete the task with greater time pressure and perhaps stress (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013 in Chowdhury & Pychyl, 2018). This behaviour is evident in our everyday lives and has been linked to a variety of major societal problems from pension poverty (Hershfield, 2011) to national and consumer debt, unemployment and workplace cyberslacking (Steel, et. al., 2018).

It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that not only psychologists but also economists have taken interest in this phenomenon. Indeed, according to research in psychology and economics, people characteristically care less about future outcomes than they do about present ones, a phenomenon known as temporal discounting (Hershfield, 2011). One reason for temporal discounting could be the fact that present rewards feel more arousing and emotional than future rewards do (Hershfield, 2011). Another could be the fact that the needs of the present may overwhelm the needs of the future (we may want to save up but do not have the financial means to do so) (Hershfield, 2011).

This bias towards the present self may also have something to do with the way our brain processes our present and future self (Hershfield, 2011). For example, a neuroimaging

study carried out by UCLA psychologist, Hal Hershfield, demonstrated that when we are thinking about our future self we activate areas in the brain associated with thinking about another person (Hershfield, 2011). In other words, we think of our future self more like strangers (Hershfield, 2011). This would go some way towards explaining why we might favour now over the future. Put like this, there is nothing 'irrational' about delaying action. Contrary to Steel's point above, if we consider our future self as a stranger then it may seem irrational to do anything that would benefit it especially if it means that we will be denying our present self.

This, however, does not necessarily shield us from potentially negative consequences of procrastination such as poorer performance (e.g., Steel 2001 in Chowdhury & Pychyl, 2018), fewer signs of subjective well-being (e.g., Tice & Bratslavsky, 2000 in Chowdhury & Pychyl, 2018) and even poorer health (e.g., Sirois, 2007 in Chowdhury & Pychyl, 2018). Procrastinators may also experience feelings of guilt, stress and self-blame, often impacting on their relationships if their procrastination is chronic (MacLellan, 2017).

It should be apparent from this discussion that procrastination will have implications for goal attainment. Generally, there are three goal phases of self-regulation, namely, goal choice (i.e. the process of selecting a goal), goal pursuit (i.e. the initial steps taken towards accomplishing the goal) and goal striving (i.e. the process of putting in the effort for goal fulfillment) (Steel, et. al. 2018). Procrastination can occur at all these phases. For example, we are more likely to struggle to focus our efforts and procrastinate when rewards and challenges are temporally distant (Grevers, et. al. 2009 in Steel, et. al. 2018) and only get energised when we get closer to the deadline (Howell, et. al. 2006 in Steel, et. al. 2018). We also procrastinate more when we are in close proximity to temptation, e.g. it has been suggested (Lord, et al, 2010 in Steel, et. al. 2018) that 'background temptations such as the internet and email, sometimes possess greater utility than organizationally important activities.' Distancing ourselves from temptations, therefore, reduces the strength of their influence as has been shown in experiments looking at self-regulation of eating (Vohs and Heatherton, 2000 in Steel et. al. 2018) as well as in academic settings (Fishbach and Shah 2006 in Steel et. al. 2018) where the removal of or distancing from temptation decreased its distracting influence.

Energy, or more specifically, lack thereof, is another reason why we procrastinate (Steel, et.al, 2018). We use energy to restrain our impulses and urges, and as it depletes, we become less able to do so (Steel, et. al. 2018). Steel also reports that tiredness is one of

the top three reasons students give for putting off work and procrastinating (Strongman and Burt, 2000, Solomon and Rothblum, 1984 in Steel, et. al. 2018).

With a little help from our (Behaviourist) friends

One way of addressing the issue of procrastination is to make the activity we need to perform in order to achieve our goal automatic. It has been argued (e.g. Karoly, 1993 in Steel, et. al 2018) that automaticity or habitualized course of action can be carried out with little or no conscious attention. This is reminiscent of my earlier discussion in which I described two largely independent thinking systems - the intuitive, automatic and unconscious System 1 and the slower, conscious and deliberate System 2. In it I alluded to an argument made by Stanovich (2004 in Evans, 2008) that System 2 can, through repeated activation, be installed into rigid implicit processing mechanisms—a kind of automation of thought.

Our efficiency seeking brain loves the energy saving automaticity. In his book 'The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do, and How to Change', author Charles Duhigg argues that *'[h]abits (...), emerge because the brain is constantly looking for ways to save effort. Left to its own devices, the brain will try to make almost any routine into a habit, because habits allow our minds to ramp down more often. This effort saving instinct is a huge advantage.'* (2012:17) Habits, Duhigg says, follow a simple three-step process closely linked to Behaviourists' behaviour formation model, namely:

1. Cue which signals the brain to go into automatic mode and triggers specific behaviour
2. Routine which is the desirable behaviour
3. Reward which reinforces the behaviour. (2012)

Repeated frequently enough, this habit loop becomes more and more automatic. Done correctly, automaticity will allow us to save energy and stave off procrastination. This, according to Duhigg (2012), is because when a habit emerges, the brain stops fully participating in decision making. It stops working so hard or diverts focus to other tasks. Neuroimaging and neurophysiological studies seem to confirm this. For example, it has

been shown (Miller, 2000) that the prefrontal cortex (PFC) may have a key role in task acquisition showing greater activation during initial learning. The activation is weaker during performance of well practised tasks (Miller, 2000). Or in Miller's words:

> *As task-relevant neural pathways in other brain systems are repeatedly selected by PFC bias signals, activity-dependent plasticity mechanisms could strengthen and establish them independently of the PFC. When this happens, the PFC may become less involved and the task less taxing on our limited cognitive resources; that is, its performance becomes automatic (2000:63).*

However, the habit loop works for all sorts of behaviours. Both the 'good' (i.e. desirable) and the 'bad' (not so desirable). One of the reasons why procrastination is so prevalent is because the cues trigger behaviour that is instantly rewarded or as Pychyl put it 'we give in to feel good'. Sitting down on a sofa triggers a series of well rehearsed responses which we complete without much thinking - pick up a remote, turn on TV, relax. This routine can be complemented with a glass of wine, beer, pizza, for an even more rewarding experience. However, those rewards do not have to be consistent either for behaviour to emerge. In fact, the famous (or infamous depending on your point of view) B.F. Skinner demonstrated that random and unpredictable rewards not only reinforce behaviours better but also their extinction rate (i.e. the length of time the behaviour will continue without reinforcements) is slower (1957 in McLeod 2018) an idea aptly expressed in the words of an angler after making a catch: *'The theory of random reinforcement. Hours of nothing punctuated by awesomeness!'* This random reinforcement is also a reason why we find the pull of our mobile phones so irresistible; we never know when the next 'life changing' message or email will come! Unfortunately, picking up that phone is at best distracting, and, at worst, often determines how we will be spending the next ten minutes or longer!

In their paper, Steel and colleagues (2018) look at a range of self-regulatory aspects affecting goal achievement. I have already briefly discussed three such aspects, namely, the pacing style (i.e. the idea that we get more energised to action the closer we get to the deadline), energy regulation and proximity to temptation. In addition to these, Steel et.al. (2018) also investigate other self-regulatory techniques such as stimulus control, temptation attention control and automaticity and theorise that these techniques could be used to promote goal striving and reduce procrastination. For example, controlling stimuli by eliminating distraction and increasing task relevant cues can improve productivity

(Steel et.al. 2018). In a study quoted in the paper, a group of college students were found to be able to study for longer after being trained in stimulus control (Ziesat et.al 1978 in Steel et. al. 2018). Temptation attention control was also found to be an effective way to maintain focus on the goal by cognitively redirecting attention away from temptations. This was famously demonstrated in an experiment carried out by a group of psychologists led by Walter Mischel colloquially known as the 'marshmallow test'.

In it, a tester offered a child a choice between one small reward (e.g. a marshmallow or a cookie) now or two about 15 minutes later and left. Although this was not the purpose of the original study (the researchers wanted to understand when the control of delayed gratification develops in children), Mischel and colleagues discovered that children who were more successful at delaying gratification were those who were better able to distract themselves from the temptation (Mischel, et. al. 1972).

Thus, creating an environment in which distracting stimuli are controlled through reducing or eliminating their saliency and cues conducive to learning (task relevant) are enhanced could lead to an emergence of positive learning habits. According to Steel and colleagues, automatic routines will reduce the chance of procrastination by reducing the number of choice points during goal striving (2018). This, they argue, is possible because such routines can take the form of planning which limits decision-making (Steel, et. al. 2018). They point out that 'study habits are often linked to increased goal attainment and automaticity of routines' (Bargh and Gollwitzer, 1994; Schmidt et al., 2013 in Steel, et. al. 2018) and that when individuals work to develop habits, they have been found to accomplish more and procrastinate less (Verplanken and Aarts, 1999). Their own research confirms this demonstrating that planning and study routines were consistently and negatively associated with procrastination (Steel, et. al. 2018).

Scheduling activities to recur on the same day and at the same time will also aid this process. Gretchen Rubin, author of 'Better than Before: Mastering of the Habits of Our Everyday Lives' makes a cogent argument that *[s]cheduling one activity makes that time unavailable for anything else (2015:74).* Moreover, if we repeat this activity at the same time week after week, this activity is more likely to become a habit. And habits, as we have already said, make things easier and help us save energy trying to decide whether or not we should be doing something or as Rubin puts it: '*Scheduling is an invaluable tool for habit formation: it helps to eliminate decision making; it helps us make the most of our limited self-command; it helps us fight procrastination.' (2015:90)* And I agree, after all

how many times have you deliberated whether or not to brush your teeth in the morning or before going to bed?

You make your habits; habits make you back

Whether or not we are an outcome of our environment, as Behaviourists would have us believe, changing our environment to support positive habits makes sense. However, what's interesting about setting a routine is its potential to change us. According to James Clear, author of Atomic Habits, creating habits in this way not only affects our ability to achieve a goal, e.g. learning a language by revising regularly, but also our identity compounds as we develop evidence for being that kind of person, i.e. a person who studies (2018). In a recent interview Clear states that '*our actions become evidence for the kind of person we believe that we are. It becomes a self reinforcing feedback loop; as you start to develop or adopt, this particular aspect of your identity then it becomes a reason for you to repeat it in the future (Clear, 2018)*. Once you see yourself as studious that becomes a reason for you to study again and try to get good grades.

Aspects of this 'identity compounding' can be seen in a prominent theory proposed by motivation psychologists, Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, known as the Self Determination Theory (SDT). SDT is an all-encompassing theory of human motivation and personality. It attempts to provide a framework to explain why we make the choices that we make and focuses on the extent to which our behaviour is self-motivated and self-determined (e.g. Deci & Ryan, 2000). The scope of the theory is quite broad but at its heart is a simple dichotomy between behaviour driven from within (e.g. engaging in activities which are inherently interesting or enjoyable) and behaviour driven from without (e.g. by external rewards such as money, praise, etc.) or, in other words, we can distinguish our behaviour as being intrinsically motivated or extrinsically motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, there is more to this distinction than meets the eye. Generally, the intrinsic motivation is considered 'a wellspring of learning and achievement' resulting in high-quality learning and creativity whilst the extrinsic motivation is often characterised as 'an impoverished form of motivation that contrasts with intrinsic motivation' (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Yet extrinsic motivation is much more nuanced than simply being about our responses to rewards or punishments. For example, working on an assembly line to make ends meet is quite different from doing an evening course at an FE college to get a more fulfilling job. In both cases the motivation to pursue the activity is extrinsic but each feels qualitatively different. We feel that we have more choice and control over the activity in the latter case compared to the former and yet neither is pursued purely for pleasure. Deci and Ryan have hypothesized that extrinsically motivated behaviours can vary in the degree they are externally controlled and self-determined and suggested four forms of regulation built around the concept of internalization (Deci & Ryan 2000). From the most controlled to the most internalised, these forms of regulation include:

- external regulation - behaviour is externally controlled and contingent on rewards or punishments, e.g. studying to earn good grades or to avoid bad ones
- Introjected regulation - represents a partial internalization of regulations. Rules are accepted as norms; we go along with a task because we think we should feel guilty if we don't, e.g. doing homework, studying for exams, or exercising.
- identified regulation - a process through which we recognize and accept the underlying value of behaviour and see its usefulness; the behaviour becomes more autonomous although it's still instrumental, e.g. homework is done because we see it as valuable and we exercise for our own health and wellbeing.
- integrated regulation - the fullest and most complete internalization of extrinsic motivation. It involves choiceful behaviour that is fully assimilated with the individual's other values, needs, and identity, e.g. I do my homework because I'm studious. (e.g. Deci & Ryan, 2000)

One could, in theory, imagine a scenario where a learner progresses along this continuum gradually internalizing a behaviour, e.g. she may initially engage in an activity such as learning a language having been coerced by ambitious parents who made a reward contingent on her attending language lessons only to experience positive aspects of language learning such as fun activities, being amongst like-minded people, etc. This may result in what Deci and Ryan refer to as an 'orientation shift' (2000). However, they are keen to stress that this continuum is not developmental, i.e. one does not have to progress

through each of the stages in order to internalize a behaviour (2000). This means that we could start at any stage of the continuum and move in any direction. So, our ESOL learner working on her weekly goals to practise English could start at the identified stage recognising that learning English is useful because it gives her better access to services and community. However, as her language competence improves, she may start to internalize this behaviour. Her newly developed competence makes her more confident which in turn leads to her becoming more independent. In the meantime, all the positive experiences and successes she has been having begin to compound. Her identity starts to develop and change and soon she realizes that not only does she have a better access to the community and society at large but she has now become a part of it. This is consistent with Ryan and Deci's assertion that in order '*[t]o fully internalize a regulation, and thus to become autonomous with respect to it, people must inwardly grasp its meaning and worth. It is these meanings that become internalized and integrated in environments that provide supports for the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy.'* (2000: 64)

In some ways a shift in identity features quite heavily in most of our goals. All of us, regardless of our background, have at some stage in our lives fantasized about becoming a successful businessman/businesswoman, as rich, slim, fit, an owner of a great car, house; we have fantasized about successfully passing our exams, getting promoted, going on a trip round the world, and so on and so forth. Self-help literature is full of advice urging us to be positive, to think positive, to go for it!

Every year the New Year's Day marks a new beginning. We welcome the new year with fireworks and lavish parties. It is an opportunity to reflect on the past year and to start afresh - to finally make those positive changes in our lives. Out with the old, in with the new! Every year up to 50% of Americans (Bernstein, 2015) and 63% of Brits (YouGov, 2015) make New Year's resolutions. Every year we set those goals, convinced that this year will be different (this year we will get fitter, eat more healthily and lose weight) only to break them soon after. In fact, so prevalent is this phenomenon that January the 17th is officially the 'Ditch New Year's Resolutions Day'. According to a 2015 ComRes/Bupa survey, 43% of us quit our resolutions in the first couple of weeks. This figure rises to 66% before the month's end (in Arnett, 2015).

So what gives? Why is it that so many of us, despite our best intentions, fail to achieve our goals? I have discussed some of the reasons already. We set un-SMART goals. We

procrastinate giving in to ‘feel good’. We underestimate the distracting power of our environment or how much work and effort this change will require. We may feel apprehensive about stepping out of our comfort zone. The solutions I have suggested have been shown to be effective in addressing and alleviating some of the problems and help us achieve our goals but recent research is uncovering something surprising. The problem, it seems, may be with the act of fantasizing itself.

Playing mind games

An exciting new area of research has emerged that looks at this curious dissonance. On the one hand we know, from Locke and Latham (1990), that goals drive us forward by directing our attention and effort, regulating effort expenditure, encouraging persistence until the goal is accomplished, etc. We also know that setting a goal demonstrates an intention to achieve and triggers learning (McLean, 2003). On the other hand, as we have seen we have this tendency to give up on our resolutions as soon as we set them despite our strong intentions and resolve to achieve them. Gabrielle Oettingen, a researcher who has spent years looking at this conundrum, has argued that, whilst the assertion that the brain motivates us by carrying an image of where we want to go and how we will feel when we get there (McLean, 2003) may be true*,* fantasizing about achieving a goal can backfire (Oettingen, 2014). She has contended that fantasizing tricks the brain into thinking that the goal has been achieved (Oettingen, 2014). Those vivid positive fantasies, it seems, make us feel so good that we often settle for the fantasy and do not pursue it any further.

In the context of education, Oettingen and her colleagues, Heather Barry Kappes and Doris Meyer, were able to show that positive fantasies about achieving good course grades were associated with lower grades, less studying and lower reported study effort in college students (Kappes, et. al. 2012). This was also the case in a vocational context where positive fantasies predicted poor academic achievement for vocational students. They showed that positive fantasies about achievement in school predicted lower attainment at the end of the school programme even in students faced with economic and social disadvantages (Kappes, et. al. 2012).

The authors concluded that *"… positive fantasies allow people to mentally experience a desired future in the present and conceal the fact that effort must be invested if the future is to be actually achieved; thus, positive fantasies are not the key to mastering a difficult environment. Quite to the contrary, they predicted low effort in the form of more days absent from school and poor achievement in the form of lower school grades."* (Kappes, et. al. 2012: 60).

Oettingen proposed (e.g. Oettingen & Schwörer, 2013) that this fantasizing about our future selves be followed by, so called, mental contrasting which is essentially creating (mentally) a contrast between the fantasies and the reality with all its messiness. This allows us to identify potential obstacles which may get in the way of us achieving our goals. Mental contrasting affects behaviour in three different ways: (a) it strengthens the association between future and reality when expectations are high and weakens it, when they are low; (b) it strengthens the association between reality and instrumental ways to overcome the reality, for example, for a student expecting a good grade in an upcoming exam, it could be a toss between going to a party (reality/obstacle) and staying at home to revise (the action to overcome the obstacle); finally, (c) mental contrasting changes the meaning of reality, i.e. the reality is interpreted as an obstacle only when expectations are high (e.g., the party on Saturday is not a fun event, but an obstacle to obtaining the high grade) (Oettingen & Schwörer, 2013).

Oettingen argues that mental contrasting as a self regulation strategy is quite versatile and can be used across people's life spans regardless of their socio-economic status and cultural background (Oettingen & Schwörer, 2013). Mental contrasting has been shown to be effective in a range of situations and contexts. For example, in one study students who were taught to mentally contrast their desired future with reality performed better on foreign language vocabulary tests two and four days later compared to students who were asked to imagine desired future only. It is worth noting that this study was conducted in schools in Germany and the USA on students from low-income neighbourhoods (Gollwitzer et al., 2011). Elsewhere mental contrasting has been shown to help type 2 diabetes sufferers improve their self-care including dieting behaviour and exercising (Adriaanse et al., 2013). Busy health care professionals were also able to better manage their busy lives and deal with professional and private problems when they were trained to self-regulate in this way (Oettingen, et. al., 2010).

Mental contrasting works because it '*helps to resolve short-term concerns and fulfill long-term wishes as it provides clarity and direction of what one wants to achieve and what is necessary to let go of.'* (Oettingen & Schwörer, 2013: 3)

Going conditional

However, being able to anticipate the obstacles should also allow us to better plan for them. This is what Oettingen decided to investigate, enlisting the help of her husband, a German professor of psychology in the Psychology Department at New York University - Peter M. Gollwitzer. Gollwitzer had been investigating how goals and plans affect cognition, emotion, and behaviour. Pertinent here is his research on using 'implementation intentions' – the forging of explicit intentions of how to achieve the goals which include identifying obstacles and planning how to overcome them. This can be simply summed up as 'if-then' plans.

Gollwitzer and colleagues have carried out numerous studies and experiments which showed effectiveness of implementation intentions. A meta-analysis of almost a hundred studies demonstrated a medium to large effect of implementation intentions on behaviour and on the likelihood of achieving our goals (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006). Despite their simplicity, Gollwitzer's Implementation Intentions have been shown to work in situations from health-related activities such as engaging in exercise (e.g. Milne, et. al., 2002) or better diets through reduction of fat consumption (Armitage, 2004) to helping individuals regulate their emotional responses to aversive stimuli such as spiders (Gallo, et. al., 2009). They were even effective in getting a group of drug addicts to write a CV by a set deadline (8 of 10 who made implementation intentions wrote the CV versus zero out of 10 for those who did not make plans (Brandstatter, et. al. 2001)).

Implementation intentions works because of their inherent conditionality. The condition contained within the if-clause becomes a cue for the action in the result clause (e.g. the doughnut in the clause: If I see a doughnut, I will have an apple!). Oettingen (2014) argues that 'forming implementation intentions prepares us mentally to take action by pre-activating in our minds the situation of an obstacle or opportunity arising.' Creating if-then plans conditions us to respond to pre-selected situational cues and automates goal

striving, that is, ‘automatic action initiation originates in a conscious act of will (if-then planning)’ (Gollwitzer, et. al. 2010) (Seeing a doughnut should prompt us to have an apple).

Oettingen and Gollwitzer had a sense that the two theories could work well together. After all, what's the point of identifying obstacles if you’re not going to do anything about them! They decided to merge their theories into one they called (you’ve guessed it!) Mental Contrasting with Implementation Intentions or MCII for short. We have seen each of the theories deliver positive outcomes, but how much better would a combination of the two be?

Oettingen (2014) argued that performing mental contrasting and implementation intentions together could make selecting and attaining wishes easier and more effective by maximizing the work your mind does without your conscious effort. Research carried out by Oettingen, Gollwitzer and other researchers confirms the potential of MCII. For example, MCII has been effective in getting people to exercise more and to switch to healthier diets. Impressively, participants in the experimental group (i.e. those who were shown how to use MCII) sustained their healthy diets two years after the intervention (Oettingen, 2014). In educational settings, an MCII intervention led to a significant improvement in children’s grades, attendance and conduct (Duckworth, et. al. 2013) and children at risk of ADHD were better able to self-regulate their behaviour following only one training session (Gawrilow, et. al. 2013). MCII was also effective in helping students manage their time better, and working mothers enrolled in a vocational business programme attended classes more regularly (Oettingen, et. al. 2015).

MCII soon became WOOP (Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, Plan) which, in Oettingen’s opinion, not only captured all the key steps involved in MCII but also seemed more accessible to the general public (Oettingen, 2014).

The dreams we dream

So, as we have seen setting goals has numerous advantages with clear applications for classroom and educational settings including ESOL. In fact, there are so many benefits of goal setting that it would be criminal not use it. My experience tells me that migrant

learners learning English have dreams and aspirations just like everyone else. Those dreams reflect their specific, unique circumstances. But all of us have specific, unique circumstances and yet, at the end of the day our goals converge on, more or less, the same things - we all want to have friends, be accepted, be able to give our children the best possible support and education, have fulfilling jobs, be independent, live happy and dignified lives and so on and so forth. What makes us different are not the dreams, it is the barriers. You will inevitably be at a disadvantage if you are not competent in the language of the country you chose as your new home. This, too, applies to your ability to accomplish your goals. One might argue that it is possible to get by without good language skills especially in countries like the UK which have large minority groups. True enough. I often come across people who have lived in the UK for ten, twenty years managing just fine. Those individuals develop coping strategies, stay within their linguistic communities or rely on the support of others when they have to deal with the 'outside world'. But eventually even they realize that there is a world beyond their communities. A world full of opportunities, a world in which their dreams can come true, one that can only be accessed with better language skills. And that is when they take the first step towards accessing that world and towards realizing their dreams. They enrol on an ESOL course. This is an important step. It is when they move from thinking about their goals to doing something about them.

Zoltan Dornyei, a Professor of Psycholinguistics at the University of Nottingham, defines these steps in a Process Model of Second Language (L2) Motivation (e.g. Dornyei & Otto, 1998) which outlines three motivational phases: pre-actional (comprised of goal setting, intention formation and intention enactment), actional (supported by executive motivational influences such as quality of learning experience, sensitivity to aspects of the environment, perceived progress, etc) and post-actional (evaluation).

The transition from the pre-actional to actional phase is not an easy step to take, either. It requires effort and energy, a change of routine and stepping outside of one's comfort zone. As we have seen in the discussion on procrastination, there are numerous reasons why we may want to delay this decision and the perceived effort of engaging in an activity of this nature is certainly one of them. In fact, so important is this step that Dornyei likened it to crossing the metaphorical 'Rubicon' where 'the individual has committed him/herself to action and now the emphasis shifts to factors concerning the implementation of action' (Dornyei & Otto, 1998).

Except where Rubicon was a point of no return, signing onto a course and attending the first session is not. The first step is important but equally important is maintaining the new activity. As we have discussed keeping your resolutions can be a tricky business! The model described by Dornyei stipulates that for the learning experience to be successful it needs to meet several conditions, which include (among other things) quality of learning experience, i.e. the novelty of the course content/learning material; goal/need significance (is the stimulus instrumental in satisfying needs or achieving goals?) and teacher's motivational influence (e.g. autonomy supporting vs. controlling) (Dornyei & Otto, 1998). Fortunately, retention rates on ESOL courses stand at a very respectable 93% nationally (e.g. CALAT, 2018) which means that teachers get these things right but also highlights the perceived value of learning or improving one's language skills itself.

However, learners tend to underestimate the amount of work that is required to make progress in learning a language. They often expect to learn everything they need in the classroom which may be possible on longer or more intensive courses. Yet, as discussed in the previous chapter, drastic cuts to the funding and more stringent eligibility criteria for fully funded courses often means that many learners can only access shorter courses where they may have to supplement their classroom learning with independent learning outside of the school settings. To this end I strongly believe that promoting learning autonomy and independence is one of teachers' key responsibilities irrespective of the length of the course. Learning a language is not a one-off event that can be 'delivered' by a teacher. Neither is language learning something that happens only in the classroom. Nor is it something that is done to learners. Language learning is a long-term and continuous process. A process that requires learners' full participation - it is an immersive process that extends far beyond the classroom walls. For if you live in the UK, English is everywhere. It does not magically appear when you enter the classroom and disappear when you leave it. It continues to exist before and after the class. And yet for many learners the classroom is the only place where they get to use English. Some learners (e.g. stay-at-home parents) often find themselves socially isolated. The only time they meet others is when they drop off or pick up their children. Others, due to a lack of confidence or for fear of misunderstanding others or being misunderstood, avoid situations which require them to use English. When I surveyed my students on their language use outside of the classroom, they admitted to using English on average for about 15 minutes a day. My aim as a teacher has been to increase this number ever since. Which is why I believe that self-organized learning should go in tandem with

teacher organized learning. Thinking about and identifying opportunities to study, practise or use English outside the classroom will not only help learners improve their language skills and boost their confidence but may also have a profound effect on their sense of self, their agency and their place in society.

Naturally, not all learners will have the tools or sufficient meta-cognitive skills to effectively manage their own learning. Dornyei argues that the knowledge of and the ability to use self-regulatory strategies is an important source of scaffolding and enhancing motivation (Dornyei & Otto, 1998). Researchers generally agree that whilst all learners can inherently self-regulate, there are individual differences in terms of their knowledge base of those strategies as well as when to use them (e.g. Winne, 1995 in Dornyei & Otto, 1998). It is therefore fitting that teaching of these strategies should feature in aspects of teaching and learning.

And it does, in the form of the much maligned ILPs (Individual Learning Plans). I discussed ILPs in the previous chapter but it is worth reiterating some of the points here; however, before I do, let us first briefly consider the background of ILPs in the UK. Individual planning of learning was introduced in the UK in 1984 under the guise of Records of Achievement (RoA) when the Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office published Records of Achievement: A Statement of Policy (Broadfoot,et. al. 1988). The policy listed four key purposes of Records of Achievement, namely:

• to recognise, acknowledge and give credit for what pupils have achieved and experienced, not just in terms of results in public examinations but in other ways as well.

• to contribute to pupils' personal development and progress by improving their motivation, providing encouragement and increasing their awareness of strengths, weaknesses and opportunities.

• to help schools identify the all round potential of their pupils and to consider how well their curriculum, teaching and organisation enable pupils to develop the general, practical and social skills which are to be recorded.

• to provide young people leaving school or college with a short, summary document of record which is recognised and valued by employers and institutions of further and higher education. (Broadfoot, et. al. 1988: V-VI)

In their evaluation report, authors, Patricia Broadfoot and colleagues, note that according to the DES policy statement the internal processes of reporting, recording and discussion between teacher and pupil should cover a pupil's progress and activities across the whole educational programme of the school, both in the classroom and outside, and possibly activities outside the school as well (paragraph 16 in Broadfoot, et.al. 1988:3). It is pertinent to note that these early conceptions of ILPs focused not only on the acquisition of knowledge within the limits of the school curriculum but also emphasised the role of activities outside the classroom in pupils' progress. The focus on personal development is another interesting aspect of this policy. This is also noted by Broadfoot who observes that coverage as applied to records of achievement can be regarded as having two interrelated dimensions: on the one hand it involves conceptions of the curriculum which can be interpreted narrowly (with academic or pastoral elements) or widely (including extra-curricular activities); on the other hand it involves conceptions of the person which again can focus narrowly on pupil's actual achievements or more widely on things the pupil has experienced or on the qualities or attributes the pupil possesses or has developed (1988:3).

Broadfoot's review of 9 schemes piloting the RoAs found evidence that many pupils found the opportunity of talking with their teachers on a one-to-one basis about achievements, experiences, needs and appropriate future targets a rewarding and helpful experience that had had a positive effect on their motivation. She argues that this is likely due to the changes in classroom approaches and relations which underpin the impact on pupils which is likely to be a reflection of the extent to which teachers are genuinely attempting to institute not just a 'paper and pencil' exercise but a different approach to teaching and learning itself (1988). There is also evidence that this promoted two kinds of motivation - intrinsic (directed towards learning) and extrinsic (derived from having a record of achievement) (ibid). Moreover, the perceived positive response in pupils resulting from the record of achievement activities seems to have had a positive impact on teachers' morale (ibid).

Elsewhere a 2003 review of 25 studies which looked at PDP (Personal Development Plan) processes in higher and related education provides evidence to students, teachers and institutional administrators that the processes and actions underlying PDP do have a positive impact on student attainment and approaches to learning (Gough, et. a. 2003).

By all measures an ILP has all the hallmarks of a practical teaching and learning tool. The goal setting methodology underpinning this document, allows teachers and learners to identify and agree SMART learning objectives. In language learning it means that the distal and often overwhelming goal of mastering a second language can be broken down into smaller, achievable, proximal goals against which progress can be measured. Achievable goals allow learners to experience success which, according to Dornyei, may have a powerful motivating function in that they mark progress and provide immediate incentive and feedback (Dornyei & Otto, 1998).

And yet, as we saw in the previous chapter, ILPs do not work. Not for anyone. Not for the teachers who see them as a frustrating 'bureaucratic box-ticking' exercise that takes away from the 'real' work (Hamilton, 2009). Not for the students who do not fully understand the purpose of the document, let alone be motivated by the goals (Hamilton, 2009). And I doubt that even the policy makers responsible for the introduction of this document are entirely happy. After all, if the purpose of the document was to improve results, there's little evidence that it does so (e.g. NACAC & Hobsons, 2016).

Another flaw of ILPs, in my view, is that the objectives set for learners in ESOL classes are fairly linear and tend to focus only on aspects of the language covered in the scheme of work which are subsequently evidenced by learners completing classroom-based tasks (Baynham, et.al. 2007). I would argue that whilst it is important to link objectives to the coursework to measure and monitor progress, it is also important that, just like language which exists beyond the classroom, learning goals too should extend beyond it. Neither should they necessarily be linked or limited to practising and mastering discrete linguistic items. These goals should focus on maximising language use and on practising it in its 'natural environment' where learners challenge themselves to step outside of their comfort zones.

Perhaps Hamilton is right when she argues that ILPs have become victims of the government use of performance indicators and high-stakes targets and that the social interactions between tutors and learners have been hijacked by 'bureaucratic goals, procedures and judgements of worth' all of which has adversely affected 'key dimensions of identity' such as subjective feelings, social relations and values (2009).

The picture painted by Hamilton is sombre, but it is hard to disagree with her assessment when she states: '*Learners' identities are shaped through the categories into which their*

experience is translated. They are arranged into levels of competence, labelled by learning style, positioned as inexpert in the learning process as SMART targets determine what is of value for them to study and what should be disregarded' (2009: 239).

The model I am proposing hopes to change this dynamic by handing the responsibility of setting goals and objectives over to the learners. They will decide the what and the when. They will be positioned as 'expert' rather than 'inexpert' in the learning process as only they know intimately what is important to them and the best way to achieve it. The model also embraces the social aspect of learning a language by creating opportunities for learners to call on each other for ideas and support when setting goals and completing them.

The teacher's role in this process is to guide and facilitate it, to discuss options and provide support. The model builds on the strengths of the goal setting methodology. It taps into the goals' power to motivate and drive us forward. It acknowledges that we are all busy, fallible and prone to procrastination and provides strategies to address and counter this. I hope that this will help learners improve their language skills but also empower them to achieve their personal and professional objectives whatever they may be.

This study, therefore, aims to investigate if goal setting methodology as outlined above will work in community based ESOL classes. It also aims to find out if it can offer an alternative to Individual Learning Plans.

Chapter 3 (methodology) - Ontological and Epistemological Deliberations (ramblings of a reformed positivist)

"If you would be a real seeker after truth, it is necessary that at least once in your life you doubt, as far as possible, all things." - Rene Descartes

Preamble

This chapter starts with a brief overview of Behaviourism which was used in the previous chapter as a basis for discussion about human learning allowing me to better develop my understanding of the underlying principles of goal setting. I feel that it is important for me to go through this process again. This time with a view to engage in a self-critical analysis and reassessment of my own epistemological and ontological positions. Behaviourism sits squarely within the positivist paradigm whose objectivity has an attractive quality but which, as I will argue, is not sufficient to fully understand the complexities of acquiring knowledge within the context of adult learning. To this end alternative paradigms such as constructivism and interpretivism are reviewed before outlining my own ontological and epistemological positions.

Behaviourism… again

In the previous chapter I engaged in a discussion about behaviourism and argued that despite its criticism aspects of behaviourism remain relevant today. Behaviourism is built on the premise that, like in natural sciences, everything, including human behaviour, can and should be measured in order to be explained and understood. In order to be able to do that behaviourism reduced all behaviours to observable reflexes produced by a response to certain (observable) stimuli in the environment, or an accumulation of such reflexes over a period of time combined with one's current motivational state and controlling stimuli.

Behaviourists' approach to studying behaviour was not uniform. The two main branches of Behaviourism are Watson's Classical S-R Behaviourism and Skinner's Radical Behaviourism.

John Broadus Watson, an American psychologist, kicked off this new field of psychology with a publication of his now famous behavioural manifesto - an event which has come to be known as 'the first phase of the "Behavioural Revolution"'. Watson's behaviourism rejected introspection (i.e. the analysis or examination of one's own experiences, emotional states and consciousness) as a valid form of scientific enquiry. Its focus on inner states was deemed too **subjective,** and thus, unreliable, private and incapable of direct intersubjective verification (Moore, 1999). As such, Watson's Classical S-R Behaviourism sought **objectivism** in its pursuit to understand and explain behaviour. It stated that behaviour could only be understood *'in terms of the stimulus-response reflex model, in virtue of the relationship between publicly observable variables and publicly observable variables in the environment'* (Moore, 1999: 43).

If Watson's behaviourism was the 'first phase of behavioural revolution' Skinner's was part of the second. Skinner's Radical Behaviourism built on Watson's model; however, it accepted that there might be processes within the organism which should be acknowledged, e.g. private phenomena such as thoughts and feelings which cannot be inter-subjectively verified, but suggested that they too are controlled by environmental variables. In his paper summarising the basic principles of behaviourism, Jay Moore explained that, such private phenomena may be incorporated at the behavioural level as either stimuli or responses in the same way that public stimuli and responses are incorporated (1999:47). Radical behaviourists argued that cognitive functions such as thinking, problem solving, etc. are not psychological but 'covert' forms of behaviour and tried to understand how they develop and how they enter into the contingencies of subsequent behaviour (Moore, 1999: 47).

Other variants of Behaviourism include Teleological Behaviourism and Psychological Behaviourism which broadly followed the same tenets as above but added a focus on capacity for self-control and free will as well as differentiated human learning as being unique, and not evident in any other species (Staats, 1996).

Regardless of the variant, behaviourists believed that psychology should be seen as a science and stressed the importance of scientific rigour in pursuit of knowledge. They argued that any *'theories must be supported by empirical data obtained through careful and controlled observation and measurement of behaviour'* (McLeod, 2017 no page numbers).

Watson (1913) stated that: *'Psychology as a behaviorist views it is a purely objective experimental branch of natural science. Its theoretical goal is … prediction and control.'* (p.158 in McLeod, 2017).

Permeation

The main tenets of behaviourism also permeated into linguistics (most notably the first and second language acquisition and learning) which is how I first came across them. As a student on a BA level TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) course, understanding various theories of language acquisition (both first and second) was a key part of my training that would later inform my teaching practice. As I journeyed through them, I discovered Skinner's explanation of the first language acquisition which is very much in line with what I have already said about Behaviourism, i.e. that all actions, including learning language, are learnt behaviours. True to his beliefs, Skinner argued that language is 'learnt through 'verbal operants' that are controlled by the situation, which includes the social context, the individual's past history and the complex stimuli in the actual situation' (Cook, 2001 :188). So a child might be rewarded with food or attention from parents who are responding to her cries. The child builds up the complex use of language by interacting with people in a situation for a specific purpose. These ideas gave birth to a second language teaching method called audiolingualism which was very popular in the 50s and the 60s (Cook, 2001). The audiolingual method placed its main emphasis on learning (or rather memorising) fixed grammatical and phonological structures, especially for speaking and listening. New material was presented in dialogue form and learners practised formulaic expressions by mimicking the teacher and by responding to the supplied cues. To get an idea of what it might have looked like, consider the example below which illustrates it quite nicely.

So, following an introduction of the aims of the lesson, our Audiolingual teacher might start an activity by writing and modelling, ‘Could I have some (milk, water, cola)?’ She says: ‘milk’. The students answer:

- Could I have some milk?
- Water.
- Could I have some water? (Cook, 2001: 206)

The drill could continue with some variation of vocabulary or could be ‘spiced up’ with more ‘realistic’ language in an attempt to make it more conversational, e.g.

- What about milk?
- Oh yes, could I have some milk?
- And cola?
- Oh yes, could I have some cola?
- And you might need some mineral water.
- Oh yes, could I have some mineral water? (Cook, 2001: 207)

As we can see, a great deal of mechanical repetition in the form of dialogues and drills was used for memorization of pronunciation, intonation and form. Curiously, focus on grammatical explanation or meaning took a second stage as it interfered with habit formation and vocabulary was strictly limited and learned in context (Cook, 2001).

The audiolingual method went out of fashion not only because the constant and rather ‘mind-warpingly tedious’ drills made for a rather ‘uninspiring’ learning experience but mostly because the expected results never materialised (e.g. Hanchey, 1974). Just like using a phrasebook abroad without knowing the language, transferring learnt patterns to real world communication proved tricky (what good is a perfectly formed and pronounced question if the response is not in the phrasebook!). However, the techniques used in audiolingualism seeped into the teaching methods that followed. Modelling of so-called target language, drills and dialogues continue to be used in EFL/ESOL classrooms today. Teaching methods such as PPP (Present, Practise, Produce) provide a model which is easy to follow by teachers and create a safe environment for students to learn and

practise new language. To clarify, ‘safe’ here means controlled in terms of the language that students can use, usually limited to the target structures. This control does eventually make way for freer practice at the ‘produce’ stage of the lesson during which students are allowed to ‘experiment’ with the language mixing the new language with structures that they have already internalised. Personally, I never got to teach (or learn for that matter) English using the audiolingual method in its purest form (although I had heard stories about expensive language schools fully fitted with fancy language labs where students could drill their ‘utterances’ to perfection) but I did use PPP and appreciated the structure it gave to my lessons.

The pendulum

However, the changes that saw the end of audiolingualism were part of a much greater paradigm shift taking place at the time. Behaviourists’ (or rather Skinner’s) simplistic attempts at explaining language acquisition were quickly met with critique from a new breed of theorists - the nativists. Unlike behaviourists who generally claimed that the mind is tabula rasa at birth (e.g. Hayes, 1995), nativists such as Noam Chomsky begged to differ. They argued that mind is filled with ideas or an internal structure at birth. For example, in response to Skinner’s theory of language acquisition, Chomsky insisted that our interactions are just too complex to be an outcome of conditioning and that behaviourism cannot explain the speed of language acquisition or the human capacity for generating novel and unique utterances. He argued that traditional reinforcement learning had little to do with humans’ abilities to acquire language (Chomsky, 1959). Instead, he posited that every child is born with a hard-wired language faculty - the Universal Grammar which gives them an understanding of the rules of a language. Children need to be exposed to samples of a natural language (language input) to activate the device. Once this language acquisition device is activated, children discover the structure of the language to be learned. Input serves as evidence on which they base their knowledge of language (Yang, 2002). Vivian Cook, Emeritus Professor of Applied Linguistics at Newcastle University, explains that input can be either positive, that confirms their hypothesis about the language, e.g. word order, or negative, e.g. lack of evidence to the contrary (if they never hear sentences without subjects, they deduce that English

sentences must have a subject). Negative input can also come in the form of correction (Cook, 2001). All they need to do is to acquire the vocabulary.

Inevitably, nativist thinking influenced language teaching and was soon to influence my own thinking on what constitutes effective teaching of languages. One of the most prominent protagonists was Professor Stephen Krashen, who we met in the previous chapter. Krashen applied Chomsky's theories to second language acquisition proposing a new approach to teaching languages called the Natural Approach (Krashen and Terrell, 1983). Natural Approach was based on Krashen's five key hypotheses:

- the Input hypothesis;
- the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis;
- the Monitor hypothesis;
- the Natural Order hypothesis;
- and the Affective Filter hypothesis.

Krashen argued that in order to acquire a language, students have to be exposed to so called 'Comprehensible Input' (or i+1), which is just beyond their current level but not so hard that it cannot be understood (Krashen described this in his Input Hypothesis).

He also made a distinction between 'acquisition' and 'learning' where acquisition is akin to the way children acquire their native language, namely, a natural, subconscious process where the learner is unaware of the process taking place. It happens serendipitously as she interacts with the linguistic environment. The learner may actually be unaware of possessing such knowledge, once the new knowledge has been acquired. Learning, on the other hand, is a conscious process which involves formal instruction. New language forms are represented and possibly contrasted consciously by the learner as "rules" and "grammar". According to Krashen, these "rules" - while known by the student - may well have no actual impact on the language produced by the student. Krashen also argued that learning with its focus on grammatical structures cannot lead to acquisition and suggested that classroom teaching is useful but only as a source of comprehensible input in places where learners do not have access to language input outside of the class (Krashen, 2009). The last hypothesis pertinent to this discussion is Krashen's Natural Order hypothesis - the idea that there is a sequence, a necessary

order, in which rules of language are acquired. The order of L2 (second language) acquisition more or less follows L1 acquisition:

> *'the stages for a given target language appear to be strikingly similar despite the first language of the acquirer (although particular first languages may influence the duration of certain stages). This uniformity is thought to reflect the operation of the natural language acquisition process that is part of all of us.'* (Krashen, 2009: 15)

Krashen's favoured mode of acquiring a second language is through immersion. Immersion programmes, as he describes them, 'are public school programmes in which majority language students study in a minority language (e.g. French in Canada, Spanish in the United States)' where 'exposure to the second language comes primarily from the classroom teacher and materials' (Krashen,1985 :16). He argues that immersion works because it provides students with comprehensible input by making subject matter material comprehensible through grading of language and making it accessible to students (Krashen, 1985).

Much of Krashen's Natural Approach has been challenged or even debunked (e.g., Liu, 2015); however, the ideas themselves influenced EFL classroom practice around the world. The pendulum swung again and Communicative Approach took the helm. Note also how we have moved from 'method' as in the audiolingual method to 'approach'. In his overview of second language methods and approaches, Dr Eugene McKendry (2006), argues that the choice of the word 'approach' signals a move away from method (i.e. a particular set of features to be followed) to approach (a set of basic principles which are developed in the design and development of practice in teaching and learning). This seems essential as the communicative approach is far from being uniform. Rather, it is a collection of methods and techniques with a broad shared focus on communication. McKendry (2006) argues that the diversity of learning contexts necessitates such 'an informed, eclectic approach'. A view he backs up with a quote from Nunan:

> *'It has been realized that there never was and probably never will be a method for all, and the focus in recent years has been on the development of classroom tasks and activities which are consonant with what we know about second language acquisition, and which are also in keeping with the dynamics of the classroom itself.' (Nunan 1991: 228 in McKendry, 2006 no page numbers)*

In search of an equilibrium

But I was not at this stage quite yet. As a young teacher, I found Krashen's ideas on 'bathing learners in the sea of comprehensible input'[5] instantly appealing and, like many teachers before me, I decided that communicative approach was the best way for my students to learn English. All these labels, the names of tenses, parts of speech, etc we have to learn in order to learn a language are simply redundant. No one teaches labels to children. I believed that, just like children who despite not being explicitly told about grammar somehow figure out how to express themselves accurately, adults too should be able to do it given sufficient comprehensible input. If it works for children, surely it will work for adults who have one language already, right? Wrong! As it turns out, I was taking Krashen's ideas too literally. I wasn't alone, either. As McKendry points out:

> *'The breadth of possible applications can lead to misinterpretations. In the United Kingdom, for example, the National Curriculum introduced in 1988 led to a topic-based emphasis that sidelined the role of grammar, arguing from Krashen that comprehensible input alone was required. This ignored, however, the difference in context between transitional bilingual education for Spanish speakers in the USA and the few classes a week offered in British schools.' (2006, no page numbers)*

Thankfully, as McKendry pointed out, communicative approach is more than just one method. I soon realised that there has to be a balance between skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing) and systems (grammar, vocabulary). Generally, communicative approach afforded this flexibility.

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[5] I borrowed this vivid metaphor from Scott Thornbury (https://scottthornbury.wordpress.com/2009/12/27/k-is-for-krashen/)

In his book ‘Communicative Language Teaching Today’, an applied linguist and educator, Professor Jack C. Richards lists key assumptions of current communicative language teaching. As one would expect from a communicative approach a big emphasis is placed on the value of communication, e.g.:

- Second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication.
- Meaningful communication results from students processing content that is relevant, purposeful, interesting, and engaging.
- Communication is a holistic process that often calls upon the use of several language skills or modalities. (2006:22)

However, focus on accuracy and on the underlying rules of language features quite heavily, too, as seen in the next three assumptions:

- Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, expand their language resources, **notice how language is used,** and take part in meaningful interpersonal exchange.
- Language learning is facilitated both by activities that involve **inductive or discovery learning of underlying rules of language use and organization**, as well as by those involving language analysis and reflection.
- Language learning is a gradual process that involves creative use of language, and trial and error. Although errors are a normal product of learning, the ultimate goal of learning is to be able to use the new language both **accurately** and fluently (Richards, 2006: 22-23, my emphasis)

Personally, I am much more comfortable with the position offered by the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach compared to my (mis)interpretation of Krashen’s proposition. In the context in which I teach striking the right balance between communication skills (which in my view also include written communication) and grammar is important. I do agree with the assumption above that learners should communicate

both accurately and fluently. Both are important if they are to fulfil their dreams and aspirations both personal and professional.

Moreover, learning grammatical items in the classroom can potentially increase their saliency outside of the classroom. It also supports the development of metacognitive skills such as self-reflection which makes learners more likely to notice any mismatch between their current knowledge of the language and the target. It is yet another tool in the learners' arsenal, that allows them to become more independent and self-directed.

I am also happier with other aspects of this approach such as the classroom environment and the role of the teacher within it. The classroom activities CLT promotes are based on cooperative rather than an individualistic approach to learning where learners are expected to listen to one another in group or pair work tasks. They are also expected to take on more responsibility for their own learning. Classrooms within this framework become communities where learning is an outcome of collaboration and sharing (Richards, 2006). In a classroom that focuses on promoting learner independence, a teacher is 'relegated' to the role of facilitator and monitor, who *'creates a classroom climate conducive to language learning and provides opportunities for students to use and practice the language and to reflect on language use and language learning.' (Richards, 2006: 23)*

This is in stark contrast to the strictly controlled parameters of the audiolingual method where the teacher has the central role as the keeper of knowledge, a model for correct language and a 'banisher of errors'. It is also in contrast to the somewhat 'laissez faire' nature of the naturalists' approach which favoured an immersive, hands-off style.

Communicative approach with its focus on collaborative meaning formation, sits within constructivism the main premise of which is that people create their own meaning through experience. The two key theories within the constructivist theory are cognitive constructivism proposed by a Swiss educational psychologist, Jean Piaget and social constructivism proposed by a Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotsky. The two theories differ in some important aspects.

Piaget's position is that learning is a dynamic process through which knowledge is constructed by learners interpreting and learning from the events around them forming and testing their own theories of the world rather than responding to stimuli they encounter (Ormrod, 2004). At the heart of Piaget's theory lies the principle of equilibration - the idea

that ‘all cognitive development progresses towards increasingly complex and stable levels of organization’ (Piaget, 1968, in GSI Teaching & Resource Center, 2019) Equilibration takes place through a process of assimilation of new information to existing cognitive structures or schemes. A scheme (or schema) therefore is the mental unit that represents a class of similar actions or thoughts. Schemes continue to change and reorganise as we come across new, unfamiliar phenomena which our current schemes cannot explain. This, according to Piaget, creates a disequilibrium (a mental discomfort) forcing us to replace or update our schemes which brings us back to equilibrium (Ormrod, 2004). Learning therefore is an outcome of our pursuit of equilibrium.

Piaget also proposed that all children go through four stages of cognitive development which reflect their growing sophistication of thought. These stages include, Sensorimotor stage (birth to age 2), Pre-operational stage (from age 2 to age 7), Concrete operational stage (from age 7 to age 11), Formal operational stage (age 11+, adolescence and adulthood) (McLeod, 2018).

Vygotsky accepted Piaget’s assertion that learners interpret stimuli rather than simply respond to them (and therefore his rejection of behaviourism). However, for Piaget, learning is an independent activity, centred on internal processes of individuals (Mvududu & Thiel-Burgess, 2012) and as such can be separated from the social context. And that Vygotsky simply could not accept. In his view, it is impossible to separate learning from its social context. For Vygotsky learning is a collaborative process in which society and culture play an essential role in creating knowledge and promoting cognitive growth (Ormrod, 2004). Vygotsky does not completely dismiss the individual aspect of learning but claims that it happens only after new information has been encountered, manipulated and processed collaboratively. ‘*Every function in the child’s cultural development* [Vygotsky argued] *appears twice: first, on the social level and, later on, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals.’* (Vygotsky, 1978: 57 in GSI Teaching & Resource Center, 2019 no page number). Vygotsky’s ideas such as scaffolding or Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which describe what a child can achieve with the support of a teacher or in collaboration with peers - the ‘More Knowledgeable Other’ (MKO) made their way into mainstream education.

Children no more

So far, the theories proposed by constructivists have dealt, to a large extent, with knowledge formation in children and both Piaget and Vygotsky describe processes that facilitate this. They are useful for teachers who want to understand the psychology of learning and to be able to create a learning environment that will be conducive to knowledge acquisition. However, adult learners of English would have already gone through these stages in their first language. They are not learning to classify objects or developing logic. They have already developed knowledge of the world, incorporated concepts in their schemes and use language to describe it. As learners adults usually bring a plethora of real-life experiences with them to the classroom, experiences that need to be recognized and integrated into the learning process (Knowles, 1984 in Maxfield & Noll, 2017). This is also important in a language class, however, it does put into question the nature of learning in such settings.

Judith Kroll, a distinguished professor of psycholinguistics at the University of California, has proposed that concepts are alinguistic, i.e. shared across languages but we need words (or labels) to describe them (1994). We acquire concepts and labels simultaneously as we grow. This could be at school or at home, through the process described by Piaget or Vygotsky. Often when we start learning a second language as adults we no longer need to acquire the concepts. These are already stored in our conceptual space. We do however need to learn new labels to match these concepts. According to Kroll, '*at the lexical level, words in each language appear to be stored independently, but at the conceptual level, words in each language appear to access a common semantic representation.' (1994: 166)* Kroll stipulates that initially learners access the conceptual space through their first language lexicon (in a classic case of translation) but as they become more proficient the links between second language lexicon and the conceptual space become better established allowing for a more direct access (Kroll and Stewart, 1994) which can be seen in improved fluency. Moreover, Professor Lorraine Code makes an interesting observation that, whether or not Chomsky and other nativists are right about the innate language faculty and the underlying deep structure of language, '*it is reasonable to maintain that there must be some kinds of universal, perhaps of a less elusive sort, simply because of the extent to which*

communication is possible among people of different cultures.' (1980: 246) To put it bluntly, translation wouldn't work if that were not the case.

This poses an important question, is second language learning knowledge forming? And if so, to what extent?

The Oxford English dictionary defines 'knowledge' as:

Facts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject.

If having an understanding of concepts in one language and being able to describe them using the labels (words) in that language could be considered knowledge, is learning new labels for the existing knowledge (i.e. understanding of concepts) new knowledge?

I have not had a chance to explore these ideas in depth yet, but my suspicion is that it is not. At least not in the initial stages of second language learning.

Of course, for those arriving and settling in a new country, there will inevitably be new and unfamiliar situations to which they will have to adapt. New cultural and social norms will force them to develop or update their schemes for what is and is not acceptable in their host country (which is not to say that these norms have to be accepted but this choice can only be made when we are familiar with the norms).

Understanding entitlements, sorting out accommodation, arranging school placements for children, making sense of school reports, registering with a GP/dentist, applying for jobs, understanding taxes are but a few examples where knowledge of the new context is likely to be challenged. Those embarking on new careers or developing new skills in educational settings will be acquiring both new concepts and labels simultaneously.

One could also argue that language embodies a unique worldview. Our collective experiences of geography, topography, climate, fauna, flora, our accumulated wisdom, all shape our language and our cognition - a view held by relativists (Beek, 2006). Thus, according to relativists, a language of a people embodies a worldview of that people. And just as there are different peoples speaking different languages, there are also many different ways of thinking about the world (Gomila, 2012). Should this be the case, learning a new language could open the learner to a new reality, one that has been hitherto inaccessible to them.

On the other hand, much has been made of the now discredited observation by a linguist, Benjamin Lee Whorf that Eskimos have numerous words for snow which allows them to have a richer perspective of the snowy landscape (Pullum, 1991). I guess the British can relate with their rich terminology for different types of rain from the lighter variety, e.g. drizzle, spitting, light shower, to the heavier types of precipitation, e.g. rain which can be pelting down, bucketing, chucking down, lashing, pouring, *pissing down, tipping down, raining cats and dogs or horizontal. However, at the end of the day, the British rain does not feel that different from, say, its Polish equivalent.

But perhaps the question of whether or not learning a new language constitutes acquiring new knowledge is immaterial. Language is a medium of communication and being able to communicate is certainly a skill. One could therefore argue that since 'skills' is one of the components of knowledge (as in the definition above), learning a new language contributes to and extends one's knowledge.

Then again, maybe it is not. Maybe language is separate from knowledge. Perhaps it is a tool that allows us to structure and deliver knowledge. We have already looked at Kroll's distinction between concepts and words. A similar point is made eloquently by Laurence Sherzer Ph.D. in his explanation of the relationship between language and knowledge. Sherzer argues that a language is a set of symbols that reference something else. *'This something else for the some 6000 languages we humans have on Earth is something in the mind. We call this knowledge. So we can say that language references knowledge.' (Sherzer, 2012 no page numbers)* Knowledge in his view has two sources: *'first we receive knowledge from the world around us through our senses. This is direct experiential knowledge. Then we construct from this sensual knowledge other concepts which are created of our experiences and our imagination.' (Sherzer, 2012 no page numbers)* Language has to be then created to reference this knowledge as was the case with concepts such as 'relativity' or 'quantum mechanics' which preceded the actual labels or language used to describe them.

In her recent book for charities and organisations working with refugees, Dr Sarah Crowther, the CEO of Refugees in Effective and Active Partnership - an organisation that, among other things, advocates for refugees, highlights the plight of refugees in the UK:

Refugees are vulnerable to poor treatment. This is because they have little knowledge of norms and rights and may not communicate well in English. (in press)

Language skills and knowledge of norms and rights. I think this is a useful distinction. Ultimately ESOL learners need both. Language teachers have a duty of care towards their learners, a responsibility to support and address their language needs. This is indisputable. And well designed courses will cover a range of the things discussed earlier including social and cultural norms. (In one of my recent classes we went into some detail unpacking the idea of 'small talk'!) However, even the best designed curricula cannot possibly cover all the intricacies of real lives. Which is why it is important that we acknowledge the different roles different contexts play in language learning and knowledge acquisition.

Proof of the pudding is in the data

The view that learning a new language is merely learning new labels may be simplistic but it is certainly not simple. Learning a new language is a memory feat like no other. It engages and works our brains globally. It involves long term retention as well as instant recognition and retrieval. One cannot effectively learn a language by learning isolated grammatical structures and memorising vocabulary in artificial classroom settings. Yes, classroom does play an important role in language learning but in and of itself classroom learning is insufficient. Hypotheses about language can be formulated and tested in its safety and under the teacher's careful watch but have to be reformulated and retested outside of the classroom in a somewhat serendipitous but meaningful fashion that eventually leads to an assimilation of forms into existing systems (in a process akin to the scheme reorganisation discussed earlier).

In an article titled 'P is for Postmodern method' linguist Scott Thornbury states: *'Language learning, whether classroom-based or naturalistic, whether in an EFL or an ESL context, is capricious, opportunistic, idiosyncratic and seldom amenable to external manipulation.' (Thornbury, 2012 no page numbers)* Thornbury argues that coursebooks on which many language courses are based are a 'modernist phenomenon'. '*The 'modernist project* [he reminds us] *holds that knowledge is unitary, stable, objective and disinterested, and that, by extension, learning is 'a one-way road from ignorance to knowledge'.' (Felman, 1987, cited by Thornbury, 2012)* True to this sentiment coursebooks are structured and linear. They bring order and organisation to the complexity and messiness of language learning.

They allow teachers to plan and set goals and objectives for their students that can easily be ticked off as they are covered. Regular tests provide the necessary data for teachers to be able to determine objectively whether or not these goals have been achieved. Consciously or not, such teachers espouse an objectivist/positivist ontological and epistemological position which seeks tangible and objective evidence or proof of 'being' which in this case is a score on a test. The score, or rather a student's correct answers on the test which the score represents, provides an objective measure of the student's grasp of the subject matter.

Positivism assumes that a single reality exists which is external to an observer/researcher. Objects have meaning independently of any consciousness of them. Truth is static and objective. Reality can be captured by our senses and the researcher's aim is to discover its nature (e.g. Mack, 2010).

Auguste Comte, the father of positivism, argued that 'objective reality is the only knowable reality; regularities in reality exist; these regularities can be discovered through the inductive method' (Peca, 2000:5). Moreover, in much the same vein, Comte asserted that knowledge is objective, value-free, generalizable and replicable and can only be advanced by means of observation and experiment (Cohen, et. al. 2007).

Research in this tradition tends to be deductive or theory testing and begins with a hypothesis which can be confirmed or rejected. It strives for objectivity and thus employs methodology found in natural science such as quantitative data collection and analysis which aims to measure, quantify or find the extent of a phenomenon (Mukherji & Albon, 2015). It allows the researcher to test hypotheses and look for unequivocal causal explanations. Carefully designed social surveys, closed questionnaires, pre- and post-tests or official statistics are used to collect numerical data. Control and experimental groups are set up to allow the researcher to assess the effect of an intervention. Statistical significance is often sought to rule out chance outcomes and correlations may be used to help researchers to find out what relationships exist between variables. Findings must be objective and 'unpolluted' by the researcher's own beliefs or by other variables which is why research conditions are tightly controlled.

As we have seen above, behaviourism is one example which, with its dismissal of intuitive, subjective knowledge and insistence on the pursuit of the 'scientific method', i.e. the observable, empirical evidence, sits squarely within the positivist philosophy. Those

techniques have also been applied across cognitive sciences including the study of language learning and acquisition.

Inevitably, given my background, my own ontological and epistemological thinking have been influenced by the positivist paradigm. There is something reassuring and inherently appealing about cool data. A statistically significant result is so seemingly irrefutable. Numbers don't lie and facts are facts, right? Naturally, researchers are always cautious not to over-generalise their findings and usually report them as being applicable to specific contexts but statistically significant results are the ultimate prize of research done within this paradigm. If it ain't significant, it ain't worth paying attention to!

In the past I have used these methods to investigate efficacy of teaching methods. These tended to be intervention-based experiments often with control groups. As a teacher I still like to use pre and post-test methodology to gauge learners' progress. It is reassuring for me to see improved results at the end of the course and especially rewarding for my students.

And yet, as I journeyed through language teaching pedagogies, I discovered that numbers, impressive or convincing though they may be, do not tell the whole story and in some cases can detract from it. In an article describing the declining authority of statistics, author, William Davis, illustrates this problem by focusing on the way rates of unemployment were reported in the years following the Financial Crash of 2007:

> *'What if many of the defining questions of our age are not answerable in terms of the extent of people encompassed, but the intensity with which people are affected? Unemployment is one example. The fact that Britain got through the Great Recession of 2008-13 without unemployment rising substantially is generally viewed as a positive achievement. But the focus on "unemployment" masked the rise of underemployment, that is, people not getting a sufficient amount of work or being employed at a level below that which they are qualified for. This currently accounts for around 6% of the "employed" labour force. Then there is the rise of the self-employed workforce, where the divide between "employed" and "involuntarily unemployed" makes little sense.' (Davis, 2017 no page numbers)*

One of the reasons why behaviourism has suffered such fierce criticism is because it tried to reduce the human condition with all its complexity to a series of responses to stimuli and operationalise it. Chomsky highlights the inadequacy of such simple models to

explain human behaviour in his critique of Skinner's theory. He argues *that 'a singular problem of behaviourism is our inability to infer causes from behaviour, to identify the stimulus that has brought about the response (...).'* (Chomsky, 1959 in Cohen, et.al 2007:18).

The problem with positivism is that it regards human behaviour as passive, determined and controlled and ignores intention, individualism and freedom (Cohen, et.al 2007). The strength of the scientific method - its objectivity, inevitably becomes its weakness when researchers in their pursuit of empirical evidence 'eliminate' the fuzziness of behaviour by restricting, simplifying and controlling variables leading to findings that are often said to be banal and of little consequence in real life to those for whom they are intended, e.g. teachers (Cohen, et.al 2007). And yet there is richness in this fuzziness. What happens in learners' lives outside of the classroom has huge implications for what happens in the classroom. The discussion above shows the development of my own thinking on the role of a language classroom and a teacher in supporting language learning in the context of adult language learning in the UK. My current position, as we have seen, is that language is learnt best when the two worlds (in and out of the classroom) are allowed to collide and merge.

In the article on postmodern method referred to earlier, Scott Thornbury cites the work of Michael Breen who proposed a concept of a 'porous classroom' '*in which the boundaries between the classroom, the school, the society, and the world are weak and permeable.'* (Thornbury 2012 no page numbers) This description is consistent with my own thinking. I agree with Breen when he argues that the classroom group needs to be a dynamic self-organising learning community in which experience is placed as a core starting point and constant focus of attention (Breen, 1999: 54 in Thornbury, 2012). It should also be remembered that for many learners attendance in a lesson is not only an opportunity to learn and practise English, it is also a social event - an opportunity to catch up on news and gossip. A language classroom in community settings effectively becomes a social cohesion forging, community building and stereotype busting, melting pot of cultures and ideas. An innocuous topic such as 'your free time' is an opportunity to discover how much we have in common with each other and 'shopping' inevitably leads to a recipe swapping free-for-all! Needless to say, such an unconventional classroom requires an unconventional teacher. Breen suggests that '*[r]ather than being a transmitter of knowledge, either directly, or knowledge as commodified in the pages of the coursebook,*

the teacher is re-construed as a 'cultural worker', not only forming and maintaining the classroom culture, but also facilitating a research process "resembling that of linguistic and cultural anthropology".' (Breen, 1999: 57 in Thornbury, 2012 no page numbers).

Proof of the pudding is in the eating

As a practitioner researcher I cannot extract myself from the context in which I practise. I am immersed in it. Research in this context has more in common with ethnographic almost anthropological study than positivist detached pursuit of objective, empirical data. Such real life context means that controlling variables becomes problematic and impractical or as Professor Robert Coe puts it: *"The complexity, level of interactivity, situational specificity and contextual dependence of social phenomena prevent the traditional concept of causation from being useful or appropriate"* (Coe, et al, 2017: 6) As such, this kind of research is firmly in the domain of interpretivism.

Interpretivism rejects positivist traditions and argues that direct observation is not the only way of knowing about the world. The things we perceive with our senses have to be interpreted and made sense of. Also important is the interpretivist concern for the individual. Where positivism concerns itself with large datasets in pursuit of statistical significance, interpretivism endeavours to understand the subjective world of the human experience (Cohen, et. al. 2007). This allows us to delve deeper into the object of our inquiry and gain a more profound understanding of it.

Positivist approaches allow us to determine whether or not a change has occurred, say, following an intervention, pre- and post-testing. They may even allow us to attribute this change to the intervention. But in the end, we may still be none-the-wiser as to what really happened in our 'subjects'' heads. Lacking the necessary insight that would allow us to better understand not if but why the intervention worked. After all a score on a test may be indicative of a good grasp and understanding of the topic following a period spent by the student learning and consolidating knowledge but it could also be an outcome of a cramming session the night before the test or just luck (or lack thereof) on the day. It may be affected by how we were feeling on the day of the test, whether or not we were distracted by worries about the status of our Home Office application or worries about

whether or not we are going to be evicted by our landlord who decided that he can make more money renting to someone else, or by the thought of our children being bullied at school. Suddenly the score does not sound quite so objective or informative. To view this score objectively would be missing the point (no pun intended!).

Understanding the contexts in which ESOL learners live and learn allows us to interpret the score by placing it in that context. Spending time with learners, talking to them and getting to know them allows us to gain a valuable insight into their lives. It also means that any knowledge gained in the process will be an outcome of these interactions and as such it will effectively be co-constructed. Co-constructing knowledge is in line with interpretivist epistemological position.

Knowledge of the world, according to interpretivists, is socially constructed rather than objectively determined and perceived (Carson et al., 2001, Hirschman, 1985 in Edirisingha, 2012). Researchers working within this paradigm 'scratch under the surface' by exploring and understanding the social world of the people they study, focusing on their meaning and interpretations.

Research in this tradition can utilise several key methodologies such as grounded theory, ethnography, case study or life history which allow the researcher not only to investigate and explore their hypothesis but also to gain a greater insight into the subject of the inquiry by providing her with more authentic information related to it. However, none of these is particularly suited to my context.

Grounded theory, for example, allows the researcher to develop higher level of understanding that is derived from a systematic analysis of data. Literature is consulted as part of the process of data collection rather than reviewed in detail prior to the research. The idea being that the developing theory should direct the researcher to appropriate extant theories and literature that have relevance to the emerging, data grounded concepts (Goulding, 2005) As such grounded theory is appropriate when the study of social interactions or experiences aims to explain a process, not to test or verify an existing theory (Lingard, et. al. 2008).

Engaging in research in this way may be appealing to researchers who wish to develop new theories or gain an understanding of social interactions 'unburdened' by knowledge of literature which may otherwise skew their interpretation of the data. However, in my context knowledge of relevant literature is crucial to planning and designing the study. It

also allows me to explore the current thinking on the topic and understand how it applies to my specific context.

Ethnographic research, on the other hand, is largely derived from the field of anthropology and requires the researcher to immerse herself in the social culture for an extended period of time and to keep detailed notes and descriptions of a group as a means of identifying common threads, such as learning styles, social relationships, management style, etc. (Goulding, 2005). Participant observation is used as the main mode of data collection and data analysis involves a fair degree of interpretation. In fact, researchers working within this approach aim to look beyond what people say in order to understand the shared system of meanings we call “culture” (Goulding, 2005).

Such an approach gives the researcher a truly unique perspective on the context. It allows her to experience the reality from the participants’ point-of-view - to ‘live it’: *‘The ethnographer participates overtly or covertly in people’s daily lives for extended periods of time watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions. In fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on issues with which he or she is concerned’* (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 2).

… and action!

However, it is action research that, I feel, will best allow me to answer the questions that I have set out to investigate. As such action research may not only help to satisfy my professional curiosity both as a teacher and as a researcher but also, importantly, it may help me to find a solution to a problem which is specific to my setting.

Action research is also a natural fit for me. Drawing on the work and analysis of various researchers, Dr Andrew Johnson, Professor of Literacy at Minnesota, has proposed the following definition of action research:

> *‘Action research can be defined as the process of studying a real school or classroom situation to understand and improve the quality of actions or instruction (Hensen, 1996; McTaggart, 1997; Schmuck, 1997). It is a systematic and orderly way for teachers to observe their practice or to explore a problem and a possible*

course of action (Dinkelman, 1997; McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996). Action research is also a type of inquiry that is preplanned, organized, and can be shared with others (Foshy, 1998; Tomlinson, 1995).' (2012: 1)

As a classroom teacher I am well placed to engage in action research as defined above. Being in the centre of the 'action' I can effectively identify and explore a problem by reflecting on my own practice which in turn allows me to take a suitable course of action in order to find a solution. Arguably, one could be forgiven for thinking that this sounds a lot like a problem solving exercise. However, action research is a lot more than a problem solving method. Professor Gerald Pine argues that '*action research is not a method but a paradigm which provides a conceptual, social, philosophical, and cultural framework for doing research. Action research as a paradigm also embraces a wide variety of research methodologies and forms of inquiry. Characteristically, action research studies a problematic situation in an ongoing systematic and recursive way to take action to change that situation.' (2009: 29)*

The philosophy of action research also acknowledges that human actions always take place in context and must be understood in context (Pine, 2009). This context for teacher researchers is a classroom and therefore any study or inquiry carried out by teacher researchers will lead to actions that will make a difference in that context, namely, in teaching and learning. In this context action research is a process that bridges doing (practice), learning (study), and reflection (inquiry) (Pine, 2009).

Nota bene, I also agree with Pine when he argues that in the long-term action research has the potential to improve teachers' practice, help them become more autonomous in professional judgment, develop a more energetic and dynamic environment for teaching and learning, articulate and build their craft knowledge, and recognize and appreciate their own expertise (2009).

However, being embedded in this context also means that the researcher cannot be separated from the researched. In this respect, action research challenges assumptions about control of knowledge, '*action research is by, with, of, and for people, rather than on people.' (Reason & Bradbury, 2001: 2 in Pine, 2009:31)*

In their book 'Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Applications' authors Lorrain R. Gay and Peter W. Airasian list 5 key components of action research described as the 'five Cs' which are commitment, collaboration, concern, consideration and change

(2003). All these components are important in establishing the right conditions for action research; however, it is collaboration, consideration and change, that I find particularly instructive and relevant for my study.

Collaboration is at the heart of action research. The power relations among participants are redefined. There is a parity among the stakeholders and everyone's contributions should be listened to, respected and reflected on.

Consideration in Gay and Airasian's view refers to the careful consideration we as researchers give (or should give) to reflective practice. It is the mindful review of our professional actions as we seek patterns and relationships that will generate meaning. Reflection, they argue, is 'a challenging, focused and critical assessment' of one's own behaviour as a means of developing one's craftmanship. This as we will see later also has ethical implications.

Finally, change is highlighted as an ongoing, difficult but important element in remaining an effective teacher. It is part of the developmental cycle of life. (Gay & Airasian, 2003)

These components are evident in various approaches to action research. Pine (2009) outlines four such approaches: collaborative action research, teacher as researcher, participatory action research (PAR) and schoolwide action research, and while he emphasises that there is a fair degree of overlap, it is the teacher as researcher approach that I feel best matches my situation.

The teacher as researcher approach is characterised by the belief that *'teaching should be based on research, that the classroom was a natural laboratory for the study of teaching and learning, and that research and curriculum development were the privileged preserve of teachers.'* (Pine, 2009: 50) Teacher research in this approach has been defined as *'systematic intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work.'* (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993: 23–24) *'It is systematic [Pine explains] in that it involves ordered ways of gathering data, documenting experiences, and producing a written record. It is intentional in that the research is planned and deliberate rather than spontaneous. It is inquiry in that the research emanates from or generates questions and "reflects teachers' desires to make sense of their experiences—to adapt a learning stance of openness toward classroom life".' (2009:50)*

As a teacher researcher, I have a wide range of data collecting tools at my disposal. Although action research sits within the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm and qualitative research methods are clearly the preferred choice for practitioner researchers, both qualitative and quantitative research methods could in theory be used (Gay & Airasian, 2003). The tools typically involved in collecting data include audio and video recorders, questionnaires and surveys, work samples and documents (students and teacher), observations of activities, notes and research journals, interviews, etc (. Johnson, 2012).

Given the nature of this study and the questions it seeks to answer, I feel that the tools that will best allow me to capture the necessary qualitative data include open ended questionnaires and samples of students' goals (as written in their goal books). Interviews with participants to gain a more in depth understanding of how they have integrated goal setting in their lives; what is and is not working for them. Findings from these interviews are presented as case studies.

Numerical data pertaining to students' background, age, sex, level of English, etc will also be included in the findings mainly to give the reader a better sense of the specific context. Where appropriate the organisation's own impact analysis tools such as a distance travelled questionnaire, which may provide additional data on the potential impact of goal setting in ESOL classes will be accessed.

A more detailed discussion on the merits and disadvantages of these methods will be discussed in the following chapter on data collection.

Ethical dimensions - where the lines get blurred

The unique nature of action research, where the researcher is also a teacher and the research subjects are her students, means that careful ethical considerations have to be taken. Professor Jane Zeni (1998), in her guide to ethical issues and action research, suggests that as teacher researchers we need to examine our subjectivity and look at ourselves in relationship with other participants. We are not, as she points out, '*outsiders peering from the shadows into the classroom, but insiders responsible to the students whose learning we document.' (1998: 10)*

As a practitioner researcher I have a responsibility and duty of care towards my students. Despite the implied parity between the researcher and the researched as stipulated above, whether I like it or not, as a teacher I am also in a more powerful position relative to the learners. There is a real danger that this power imbalance could be exploited by someone with a mislaid moral compass - a case well illustrated by Dan Ariely, a professor of psychology at Duke University, in his book 'The Honest Truth About Dishonesty' (2012). In it, Ariely, who had suffered severe burns to his body, including his face, describes a personal experience where a doctor, by Ariely's own admission, an honest and caring man, tries to persuade him to try a new treatment. It involves tattooing a fake beard (!) onto his scarred face to match the healthy side. When Ariely, having considered the pros and cons of such a procedure, politely declines, the doctor becomes aggressive and harsh. Struck and puzzled by such a strong reaction, Ariely soon learns that the doctor needed one more patient to publish a paper in a leading medical journal. This example demonstrates how a conflict of interest, in this case the doctor's personal gains (or rather his professional aspirations), can take precedence over the wellbeing of those who put their faith in the hands of experts and professionals. This situation, although in a different context, is not that far removed from educational settings. Ariely, being a patient at the hospital requiring regular check-ups, would have developed a good rapport with the doctor based on trust in his expertise and judgement in the same way students develop trust in their teacher's ability to do what's right. A teacher researcher, like this doctor, may be inclined to exploit that trust in order to further her own career.

But conflict of interest is not the only concern a practitioner researcher may have when conducting their research. Teacher researchers should also consider their own prejudices and biases as well as those of their students both of which may affect the data collected. For example, students' attitudes towards me and my relationship with them may affect their feedback. If they like me, they may tell me what they think I want to hear or be sparse in their comments if they don't. My own interpretation of the data may be skewed by the opinion I hold of them. And whilst it is not always possible to eliminate such biases completely (especially when the teacher/researcher and the students/researched know one another well), one can mitigate them by offering participants the opportunity to provide feedback anonymously or allowing them to withdraw from the study (BERA Ethical Guidelines 2018).

Another reason why it is important that we take ethical considerations seriously is to ensure student safety and mental wellbeing. In adult educational contexts such as the one in which this study is taking place, adult learners come from a variety of backgrounds. This is particularly true in ESOL classes. As we saw in chapter one, the last decade has seen migration on an unprecedented scale. People migrate for a number of reasons. For some they are economic - the search for better jobs, new opportunities and more comfortable lives for themselves and their families. While for many others migration is not a choice but rather a necessary decision caused by war and conflict. Sadly, many continue to be displaced by seeking refuge from violence or persecution. Emerging new social phenomena such as human trafficking, forced labour, forced prostitution, or domestic slavery, mean that increasingly we are seeing victims of such crimes being referred to ESOL classes by agencies supporting them. As teachers and researchers we should be wary not only of revealing our learners' identities but also of asking questions that may trigger painful memories.

Such considerations are addressed in BERA's Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2018) which researchers are advised to consult when designing or conducting their research. The guidelines are underpinned by the following 5 principles:

a. Social science is fundamental to a democratic society, and should be inclusive of different interests, values, funders, methods and perspectives.

b. All social science should respect the privacy, autonomy, diversity, values and dignity of individuals, groups and communities.

c. All social science should be conducted with integrity throughout, employing the most appropriate methods for the research purpose.

d. All social scientists should act with regard to their social responsibilities in conducting and disseminating their research.

e. All social science should aim to maximise benefit and minimise harm. (2018: 4)

Incidentally, the guidelines also address the conflict of interest described above. It is tackled in article thirty of the document which states: *Researchers should not undertake work in which they can be perceived to have a conflict of interest, or in which self-interest or commercial gain might compromise the objectivity of the research. (2018: 18)*

Moreover, data privacy and general well-being are also covered by laws and organisational policies such as the requirement for the Ofsted enforced safeguarding policy in which organisations explain how they promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults or the General Data Protection Regulation (2018) with which organisations across Europe have to comply.

Application of such guidelines and policies will assist practitioner researchers in establishing trust by offering participants a level of legal protection. Reassuring participants that all sensitive information and feedback provided by them will be kept confidential and anonymised when referred to in publications and will not be used to disadvantage or penalise anyone will also go some way to addressing any concerns they may have about participating in the study. While explaining clearly the purpose of the study in a way that is accessible as well as giving the option to withdraw from it as stipulated in the ethical guidelines, will give participants peace of mind knowing that they are able to change their mind if they choose to.

However, as we have seen in Ariely's example above, ethics in educational research is much more than keeping personal data safe from the prying eyes of unscrupulous criminals or cybercriminals who might use it to enrich themselves. Ethical considerations tap into something even deeper - our ability to make the right decisions. There is an axiological dimension to research that drives our choices from conception through interpretation to conclusion. Axiology *'involves defining, evaluating and understanding concepts of right and wrong behaviour relating to the research. It considers what value we shall attribute to the different aspects of our research, the participants, the data and the audience to which we shall report the results of our research.'* (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017: 28) In this sense our ethical considerations will also be influenced by the values that we hold not only as researchers but also as humans.

In an adult learner classroom environment, the professional lines between the teacher and the students can become blurred as the human connections made between them begin to 'erode' the professional lines set by institutions. In such an inclusive environment this is often inevitable. The classroom can and does become a bustling marketplace - an agora of sorts where ideas and advice are exchanged. Where stories of hardship and overcoming adversity are both inspiring and relatable. It is a place where we can discover how much, despite our often superficial differences, we have in common. Importantly, it is an environment built on trust and mutual respect. A teacher undertaking research in

this environment must be careful that this trust is not exploited or abused. It is her responsibility that her personal or professional aspirations are not put ahead of students' needs or indeed as we have seen above, their safety.

Importantly, in our pursuit of research findings we must not lose sight of the fact that all humans have dignity which must be respected, and they have a fundamental human right to make choices which I as a researcher must respect.

So, I do agree with Zeni (1998) when she states that we should look at ourselves in relationship with other participants particularly with regards to our motivations and values and ensure that we engage in research with conviction and integrity.

Post-amble

This chapter was an intellectual roller-coaster which allowed me to explore and challenge my own thinking with regards to ontology and epistemology. It helped me to realize that direct observation is not the only way of knowing about the world and to understand that there is richness in the subjective world of the human experience that large datasets cannot capture and convey and thus embrace interpretivism. I was also able to settle on action research as the most appropriate, given my context, methodology to investigate my research questions.

In the next chapter I will describe the local context of this study, introduce its participants and briefly present the findings (they will be discussed in detail in chapter 5). I will also continue the discussion on what it means to 'do research' within the interpretivist paradigm focussing specifically on its implications on data collection, data collection methods and on ensuring quality and rigour.

Chapter 4 (methods) - what have we got here?

Sometimes people don't want to hear the truth because they don't want their illusions destroyed.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Prologue

It's quarter past nine on a soggy Tuesday morning and the class is about to begin. Most of the learners are already here, shaking the rain off their brollies. So is the childminder, which means that the four mums with young children can go and leave them in a creche conveniently set up in a room adjacent to the classroom. We are waiting for a couple of students who are running a little late. We could start without them, but we don't want to bother the receptionists who, due to the school's strict safeguarding rules, would otherwise have to escort them to the classroom. The students don't seem to mind too much. It's the first class of the week and the brief wait allows them to catch up with their friends. The friendly chitchat continues even as they stroll down the wide, bright corridor into the classroom and take their seats. They do it almost instinctively in an order established on day one of the course and tacitly accepted by everyone. The classroom is spacious, cavernous almost, with tall ceilings and wall length, thermally efficient windows overlooking the school playground, so characteristic of modern eco-friendly schools. It feels bright, even on an overcast and rainy day like today. This morning the tables are as we left them last week, so no rearrangement is required. It feels warm but most of the ladies keep their jackets on. They will keep them on for the rest of the lesson. The chatter gradually comes to a halt as they go through their notes, unprompted, as a last-minute refresher before the weekly test.

"Ok, good morning everyone! I'm glad to see you all here despite the miserable weather! We have an exciting session planned for today but first let's start with the test."

Key facts - Welcome to Hildorien[6]!

The study took place in an ESOL class delivered in community settings in Bag End. However, it was not a typical venue. Thanks to the generosity of the Principal at a local primary school, the classes could take place in a bright and spacious classroom fitted with mod-cons such as a wi-fi connection and an interactive whiteboard. The school had just opened and with only three cohorts of pupils attending, it had the capacity to accommodate the classes and a creche. Unusually, the school agreed to allow non-parents (i.e. residents who did not have children at the school) to attend as well which made it a community hub of sorts. This was particularly welcome in a ward where a large proportion of residents do not speak English as their first language.

The Borough of Hildorien, one of the larger in London, is a very diverse borough. Located on the edge of the city, boasting 800 acres of woodland, country parks, fields and farms, it can be described as semi-rural. The north of the borough with its leafy, suburban streets is largely affluent. Towns such as Rosewood or Nordenwald are popular residences of wealthy city workers and as such enjoy very high incomes per capita (allinlondon, 2019).

[6] To protect the identity of the participants in this study, all place names have been replaced with fictitious or fictional names.

Rosewood High Street (Google Maps)

Bag End or, more specifically, Babinton ward where the host school is located, is in the southern part of the borough. South Hildorien is generally more densely populated and more urban in character. It is also more ethnically diverse. The 2011 census shows that 39.8% of Babinton residents identified themselves as White British background. 3.9% were from Mixed / Multiple Ethnic groups, 37.1% from Asian / Asian British background (including Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Chinese), 15.4% from Black / African / Caribbean / Black British backgrounds and 3.9% from other ethnic backgrounds (including Arab). Additionally, as many as 42.7% of Babinton ward residents were born outside of the UK (with 57.3% in the UK) (Census 2011 in Business Performance Team Residents Services, 2019).

In contrast to the wealthy north, south Hildorien is also characterised by pockets of deprivation. In 2011 when the census was done, the number of unemployed residents stood at 6.4% and economically inactive at 31.6% (Census, 2011 in Business Performance Team Residents Services, 2019) – both above the national average. A large proportion of those who were in employment at the time of the census was in elementary occupations or process, plant and machine operatives - 16.7% and 10.8% respectively compared to 11% and 7.5% in the rest of the borough. And while professional occupations or managers, directors and senior official jobs represented 17.1% and 10.2%

respectively of the general Hildorien population, these jobs were enjoyed by only 11.5% and 7.8% respectively of Babinton residents. (Census, 2011 in Business Performance Team Residents Services, 2019).

Bag End Town (Google Maps)

The contrast in income deprivation is even more striking. 21.2% of Babinton residents lived in income deprived households. This is 6.6% higher than the national average of 14.6 and 7.6% higher than Hildorien average of 13.6%. It is also a whopping 16.4% higher than Isenmouthe, a ward with the lowest income deprivation (4.8%) in Hildorien (Census, 2011 in Business Performance Team Residents Services, 2019).

Incidentally, when describing the context in chapter one of this thesis a couple of assertions relating to migrants' decisions about where to live, were made. For example, I argued that migrants arriving in a new country tend to live in poorer communities and are in low paid jobs as they try to gain a foothold in their new country (BBC, 2013). I also argued that migrants tend to coalesce in areas with communities representing their own language and background which allows them to access support networks based on their

friends and families - people who speak their language. This, in turn, may have an adverse effect on social cohesion (BBC, 2013).

The data presented above is consistent with both these assertions.

Back to school

It is not unusual or uncommon for schools to provide ESOL classes for parents (e.g. Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011). They recognise that parents' ability to communicate in English has an impact on their ability to support their children and therefore impacts on children's performance at school. Increasing parental engagement is an important issue and an ongoing challenge for schools. Research demonstrates (O'Mara, et al. 2011, Grayson, H. 2013) that an achievement gap exists between children whose parents are involved in, and supportive of, their learning, and children whose parents do not support their children's learning. Moreover, it has been shown that a cognitively stimulating home environment is a more accurate determinant of children's academic motivation than their socioeconomic status (SES): "home environment continued to significantly and positively predict subsequent academic intrinsic motivation even when SES was controlled" (Gottfried, et. al. 1998).

There are several reasons why parents might not engage with schools or get involved in their children's learning. In their review of best practice in parental engagement commissioned by the UK government, researchers Janet Goodall and Jon Vorhaus look at the effectiveness of interventions aimed at supporting and improving parental engagement in the education of children aged 5-19. The report also identifies the whys and wherefores of parental non-engagement. These include work commitments (e.g. Peters et al 2007 in Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011), lack of skills or parents' experience of their own education (e.g. Harris & Goodall, 2007 in Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011) to mention but a few.

Perhaps it is not at all surprising that competence in English (or lack thereof) presents a substantial barrier to engagement for many parents. Parents with English as an additional language not only feel less confident in their ability to offer help with homework (e.g. O'Mara et al., 2011) but are also less likely to engage with the school. Goodall and

Vorhaus (2011) report that such parents tend to stay away from parent evenings not recognising the importance of these meetings unaware that their non-attendance might be interpreted as indifference. This in turn may undermine the relationship between parents and schools and lead to a growing resentment between them as schools start to perceive parents as uninterested and 'hard to reach' while parents feel that interactions with their children are undervalued by schools (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011).

The school's decision to offer English lessons may have been driven largely by its desire to address this barrier. At least initially. Parental involvement was indeed identified by the school as key to children's attainment and its pupil premium strategy stated: "Here at Green End Park Academy, we have found one of the main barriers to be lack of academic support and aspiration at home." However, by allowing non-parents to attend the classes, the school opened up to the wider community and in doing so it became a community hub of sorts - a place where residents could come and access education not only for their children but also, crucially, for themselves as well.

Intentionally or not, the school ended up playing an important role in mitigating residential segregation and building strong and integrated communities.

Who's who - introducing the protagonists

There were 12 participants included in the cohort. All learners were assessed prior to starting their course and their competency levels ranged from consolidating at Entry level 2 to emerging at Entry level 3. At the lower level, this meant that they were able to, for example, convey general meaning with some grammatical accuracy in speaking; use knowledge of simple grammatical structures to aid understanding; predict general meaning in listening; read and understand simple texts with two to three paragraphs and compose a simple text showing some awareness of format, e.g. a simple letter or story (DfES, 2002).

All participants were local residents. An ethnically diverse group, their background largely reflected the general makeup of the minority population of this part of London as described above and included countries such as India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Iran (see figure 1 below for details).

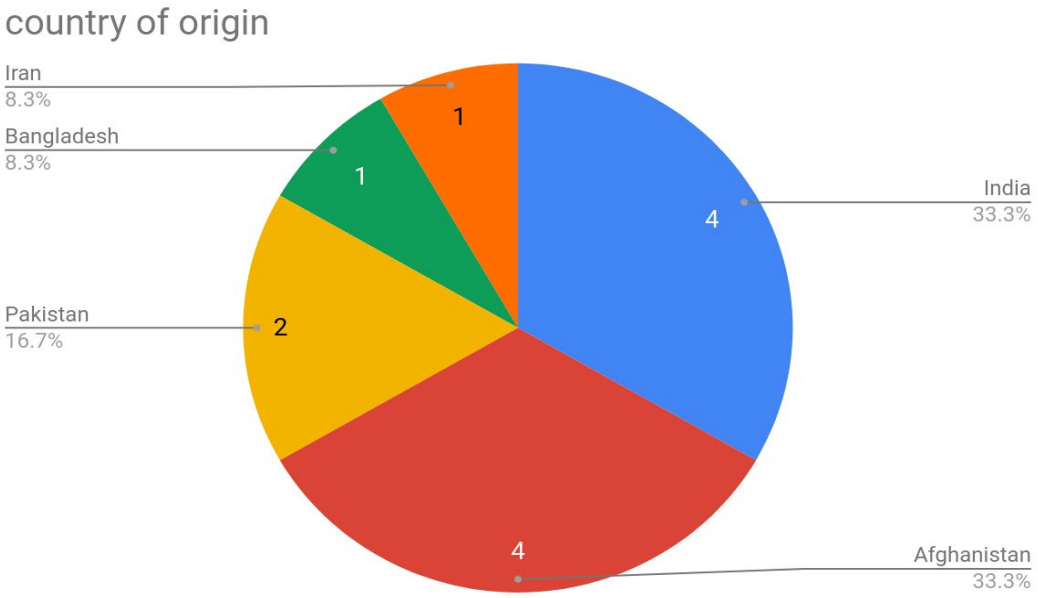

Fig 4. 1 Country of origin

With one exception, all participants were female (n=11)[7]. This was a relatively young group with an average age of 31.7 and a range from 22 to 53 (see figure 2 for details).

[7] The only male participant in the group joined in week four of the course. Despite my initial concerns about how this might affect the dynamics of the class, he was welcomed by the group and fitted very well into it. I also made sure I kept any potential biases of my own in check and ensured that attention was given according to need rather than gender. However, whilst the gender difference did not play a significant role with regards to interactions in the classroom, it did have implications for peer interactions outside of it. I describe how the participant dealt with this challenge later in Chapter 5.

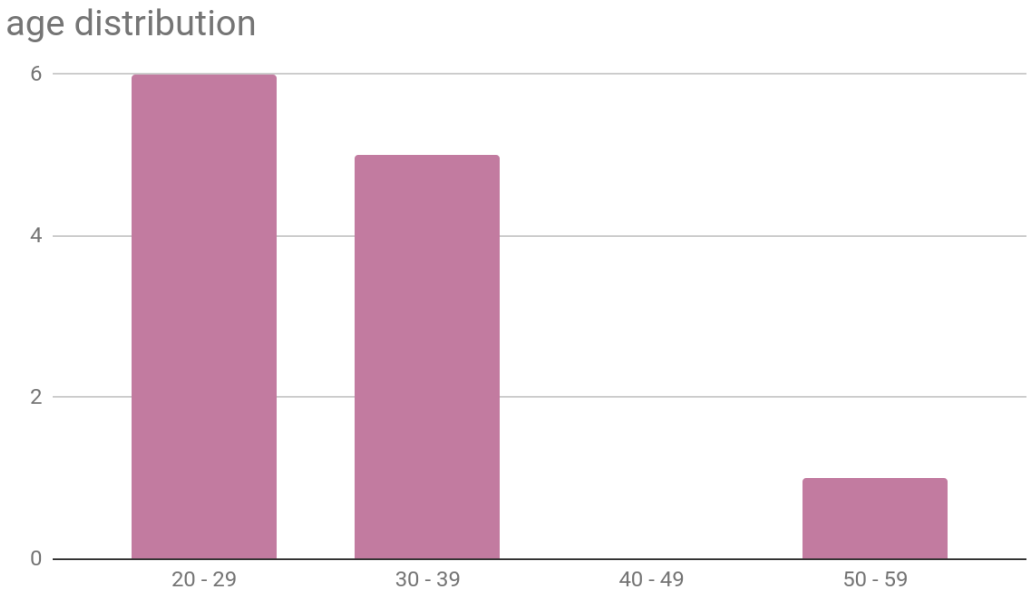

Fig 4. 2 Age distribution

All but one were economically inactive, with childcare and household responsibilities being the prime focus for most of them.

My school is your school - The course

By and large, the target audience for the classes was the non-working population of Bag End born outside the UK who due to their current situation (e.g. insufficient or lack of English language skills and/or young children) had found themselves socially isolated. In order to enable as many residents as possible to attend the classes, the course was planned to fit around their schedules and responsibilities. Generally, to help meet the needs of learners, a large proportion of funded classes are taught within school hours - between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. (Higton, et. al., 2019).

This course was no exception. Naturally, as this was an outreach and off-site provision delivered at school premises, the class schedule was invariably bound by the school's

own timetable. Thankfully, at the time the school had not been operating at full capacity which meant that there was a great deal of flexibility in accessing the classroom. In the end, a timetable of 24 sessions was agreed with class times between 9.15 am and 11.45 am. This meant that parents with school aged children could drop them off at school in the morning, attend the class and still have time to do shopping, cook dinner, clean, etc before they picked them up at 3 pm. Sixty hours of contact time in total was taught between the end of January and beginning of May 2019.

The school's flexibility and hospitality extended to the participants' children for whom the school provided a room which could be used as a creche. The significance of this cannot be overstated. A survey of representatives from 162 English language learning providers identified access to childcare as the most important barrier to engaging with English language provision (71% stating it was a fairly important or major barrier) (Higton, et. al., 2019). In all, four parents, who under other circumstances would have been excluded from English language courses, benefited from this opportunity.

The 'investigation' - search for the answers

This study aimed to investigate whether goal setting methodology could work in community ESOL classes. It also aimed to find out if it could be offered as an alternative to Individual Learning Plans. To remind the reader the study sought to answer the following overarching questions:

- To what extent can goal setting lead to an increased sense of agency and autonomy in ESOL learners?
- To what extent can goal setting help to motivate ESOL learners to practise language skills in their own time through self-directed study?
- To what extent can setting own goals increase the time English is used outside of the class?
- To what extent can goal setting help ESOL learners improve their language skills as specified in their course goals?

To find answers to the questions above, I needed to place myself at the heart of the investigation. Like an undercover cop, infiltrating a tight knit community (a group of students) and gaining their trust in order to gather specific, pertinent information. I planned the investigation, probed, listened and watched, collecting any intel I could find. All within the letter (and the spirit) of the law.

Okay, so this sounds a little overdramatic. But it is not that far from what actually happened. Research, by its very nature, is an investigative piece of work. As discussed in the previous chapter, a practitioner researcher is at the centre of action research. She identifies and explores a problem which allows her to take a suitable course of action to find a solution. All the while ensuring that data is collected and recorded in a systematic, consistent and orderly way. She also has to ensure that due care is given to ethical considerations. Identity of the participants has to be protected and their safety assured whilst biases and conflicts of interest limited (BERA Ethical Guidelines 2018). [8]

And that's precisely what I did.

Having identified the problems (e.g. insufficient time practising English outside of the classroom and learner dependence on the teacher) and a potential solution to investigate (i.e. goal setting), the next step was to set up the study. I decided that instead of the much despised Individual Learning Plan (ILP) (Hamilton, 2009; Baynham, et.al. 2007) learners would be asked to keep a goal diary where they could record their personal learning goals (a wider discussion about ILPs, teachers' perceptions of them, etc. can be found in Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis).

The goals themselves were self-identified by the learners (rather than the usual practice

[8] At this point, it is important to note that given that the learners were about to take part in a research study, the nature of the study was discussed with them and written consent was obtained. Given that the participants were ESOL students, care was taken to ensure that their consent was informed. The discussion was an opportunity for the learners to seek clarification from me and, where required in their own language, from other students regarding any concerns they may have in terms of the design of the study, issues of anonymity, right to withdraw from the study, etc. The learners were also assured that their decision to withdraw from the study would not affect their place on the course.

of being suggested by the teacher).

This was done on day one of the course. Instead of asking learners to write three goals for the course, I thought that they would find it easier to discuss the reasons for joining the class. This led them to identify three things they wanted to be able to do better by the end of the course. Having confirmed the plausibility of achieving these goals, they became learners' long-term goals and were recorded as such on the first page of their goal books. Incidentally, these goals were deliberately long-term; they were supposed to drive the learners and help them keep their eyes on the prize – a reminder of why they were doing the course.

The ensuing discussion covered a broad range of issues related to what it means to be an effective language learner. For example, learners talked about whether or not attending English classes alone was sufficient to make good progress in learning the language and achieving their goals. The discussion was also a good opportunity to talk about ways to achieve their goals and to share with one another ideas and resources they were already using. Learners also discussed their current commitments and started to think about how learning English could be fitted around those commitments whilst emphasising the merits of setting routines.

This discussion lent itself well to the second part of goal setting, namely, setting weekly goals. Having identified their long term (course) goals, it was important for learners to realise that they would have to work towards them by doing something relating to those goals every week. The role of weekly goals was to facilitate this.

As with the long-term goals, these weekly goals, were recorded in their diaries. However, unlike the long-term goals, the weekly goals had to be scheduled in line with the principle that scheduling an activity makes that time unavailable for anything else. This forced learners to consider their days carefully in order to identify time slots in the day when they could feasibly fit in the learning. They were also encouraged to anticipate potential interruptions or obstacles and plan for them using 'if -then' plans.

To further facilitate this activity, I prepared a worksheet with the key steps to setting goals listed. Although it was expected that learners would come up with their own ideas for studying English outside of the classroom, the worksheet listed some of them as well. They served as conversation prompts during the session (e.g. Have you used any of these ideas? Would they work for you? Can you think of similar ideas? etc) and, along

with their own notes, as a permanent record of what was discussed. In fact, the purpose of the worksheet itself was to serve as a set of instructions to be used alongside the goal book for learners to revisit when needed (see appendix 1).

The design of the goal book was not accidental either. Its content, layout and organisation were carefully considered in order to make the recording of goals as smooth a process as possible. It was essentially a simple booklet with pages for each week of the course (see appendix 2). In theory, learners could have used a plain notebook or a diary, but I felt that having a booklet would make it a little more structured and less ambiguous. At this point, I feel, it is important to note that unlike the ILP, which is often retained by the organisation providing the courses, the booklet was retained by the learners for the duration of the course. This was the first significant distinction between the way ILPs are generally administered and the approach chosen for this research investigation. The intention was that transferring responsibility to learners to retain the diary would not only encourage them to record their goals, but also to serve as an aide-memoire to complete, review and update their goals.

The second important distinction is the fact that goals were set and reviewed in the class on a session by session basis. At the beginning of the first lesson of each week, learners spent about 20 minutes sharing progress, reviewing and setting their goals. This was a social activity during which learners could pick up tips and ideas from each other and celebrate any successes they had had completing their weekly goals.

There was a shorter activity during the second session of the week for a quick update. This was a ‘touch base’ session which followed a similar process to the first one as described above except learners did not set any new goals. Rather, they checked with themselves as well as with one another their progress against the goals. It was also an opportunity to provide support and encouragement to each other if needed.

During the last session of the course learners were asked to reflect on their learning and discuss the progress they had made. Again, the goal book was used to facilitate this. Learners were encouraged to look back at the previous 12 weeks and the goals they set 24 sessions earlier and discuss whether or not they had achieved them. They were asked to record their thoughts on the last page of the goal book.

At the end of the 12-week period, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire designed to gauge their engagement with the goal books and their attitude towards them.

Both the goal books and the questionnaires were collected at the end of the course and form part of the research data.

And that's it. This, in a nutshell, is what I did. Okay, so I may be being somewhat self-deprecating here. Because there's more to this 'experiment' than meets the proverbial eye. What is hidden under this structure is a wealth of student interaction such as collaboration and peer support. Both are essential not only to language development but learning in general (Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009). I referred to this in another study (Lewandowski, 2017) but it is just as applicable here. As students set their goals and discuss ways of achieving them with their peers, they effectively engage in collective knowledge building which allows them to generate ideas together and to expose one another to valuable input in the process (Lewandowski, 2017). Researchers, Neomy Storch and Gillian Wigglesworth, argue that collective scaffolding allows students to work at a higher level of activity than would be the case if the learners worked on their own (2009) - a sentiment shared by Vygotsky who asserted that *an individual's mastery of higher mental functions is derived from social interaction which has been mediated by communicative language* (1976 in Villamil and De Guerrero, 1996: 54). Moreover, Vygotsky's concept of "zone of proximal development" recognizes the importance of peer assistance in the solution of tasks and, consequently, in learning and seems particularly applicable to the kind of collaborative instructional activity that occurs during peer revision (Vygotsky, 1976 in Villamil and De Guerrero, 1996: 54).

These ideas are also at the heart of Communities of Practice - a social learning concept proposed by theorists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. They define Communities of Practice as a group or community of people connected together by shared interests or a shared passion for something they do and by the desire to do it better as they interact regularly (Wenger, 1998). It is a process of collective learning in which members can collaborate, share ideas and strategies, identify problems and determine solutions.

Without going into too much detail at this stage, it is easy to recognise the hallmarks of this process within the procedures for goal setting described earlier where the goal diary is effectively a product of learners coming together for a common purpose - to help one another learn.

The question is: did it work? Did it make a difference? Was it worth spending precious class time on this activity? Before answering these questions and examining the impact

of this intervention, consideration of the tools used to collect the data to support my findings and criteria related to ascertaining rigour within qualitative research needs to be explored.

Can we be trusted?

In the previous chapter, after much deliberation I concluded that my epistemological and ontological position is consistent with an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm. Moreover, given the context of the study action research seems to provide the best approach to investigate my research questions. A study employing an action research methodology, as argued in Chapter 3, favours qualitative research methods. As a researcher 'doing' action research, degree of flexibility when choosing the best tools for the job is afforded. The data collection methods at my disposal include audio and video recorders, questionnaires and surveys, work samples and documents (students and teacher), observations of activities, notes and research journals, interviews, etc (Johnson, 2012). This, however, does not mean that I can pick any on a whim. In fact, there are a number of important criteria that anyone doing any kind of research has to consider when planning their research or devising tools for data collection.

The obvious one is *usability* which is the ease with which an instrument can be administered. When thinking about usability, consideration of how long it will take to administer the instrument, whether the instructions are clear, whether there are existing instruments that can be used, etc. needs to be taken into account (researchrundowns, 2009).

Take my questionnaire for example. It comprises 14 items. Because the study and its context were unique, there was no available instrument I could use. Naturally, when thinking about what questions to ask I was guided by my research questions to which I sought answers; however, it was also important that participants had an opportunity to express themselves fully. Moreover, given that the participants were ESOL learners, it was important to consider their level of English which, as stated earlier, was borderline E3 (pre-intermediate). This meant that the questions in addition to prompting simple yes/no answers, could also elicit longer more open-ended responses, e.g. *Did you*

manage to achieve your goals each week? why? ***(what helped you)*** *and if not, why not?* ***(what stopped you)*** (the full questionnaire is included in the appendix 3). Whilst conscious that additional questions and examples might lead participants, I felt it was necessary and justified given their level of language competence. When completing the questionnaire, participants were free to discuss the questions among themselves or ask questions if anything was unclear. Completing a questionnaire is a self-reflecting process. Doing it in the classroom was an opportunity for them to reflect on their learning process and to compare their experiences with their peers.

Other important criteria to consider when thinking of research methods can be more problematic. These include validity, reliability and generalizability. In their article 'Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research' (2015), authors Dr Helen Noble and Dr Joanna Smith provide very succinct definitions of these concepts:

- Validity is the precision in which the findings accurately reflect the data.
- Reliability is the consistency of the analytical procedures, including accounting for personal and research method biases that may have influenced the findings
- Generalizability is the transferability of the findings to other settings and applicability in other contexts (2015: 34)

The problem with these concepts may already be apparent but let me delve a little deeper into each of them to see why they could be problematic in regard to my research.

Starting with the first two. The inseparable duo - validity and reliability.

Anne Anastasi and Susana Urbina, psychologists and experts in psychological testing, have defined validity as *'the degree to which a test or measuring instrument actually measures what it purports to measure or how well a test or a meaning instrument fulfils its function'* (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997 in Oluwatayo, 2012: 391). This definition is further backed up by a myriad of types of validity that are used in research, such as content validity, criterion-related validity, construct validity, internal validity, external validity, concurrent validity, face validity, jury validity, predictive validity, consequential validity to mention but a few (Cohen et. al. 2008).

From this extended definition it is now apparent that validity with its focus on measuring and quantifying things accurately has its roots in the positivist research tradition and as

we saw in the previous chapter interpretivism is more concerned about the subjective world of the human experience which cannot be quantified.

To add to the brief definition above one way to think about reliability is in terms of its synonyms, namely, dependability, consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents (Cohen, et al. 2007). True to its positivist roots, reliability is concerned with precision and accuracy (ibid); Cohen and colleagues point out that *'for research to be reliable it must demonstrate that if it were to be carried out on a similar group of respondents in a similar context (however defined), then similar results would be found'* (2008: 146). This, again, is not within the purview of interpretivism.

If that is the case, how do I demonstrate validity and reliability? Or perhaps I don't need to demonstrate it at all.

Maybe not. Some researchers, (e.g. LeCompte and Preissle, 1993 in Cohen, et al. 2007) have suggested that *'the canons of reliability for quantitative research may be simply unworkable for qualitative research.' (2007:148)* They highlight uniqueness and idiosyncrasy of situations as strength, not weakness, of naturalistic studies, questioning the need for replicability (in Cohen, et al. 2007).

Others (e.g. Stenbacka, 2001 in Golfshani, 2003) have argued that since reliability and validity are concerned with measurements, they have no relevance in qualitative research and are therefore an irrelevant matter in the judgement of quality of qualitative research.

There are, however, those who find these concepts useful and argue that we should pay attention to them.

One solution could be for these concepts to develop a new 'personality'. For example, Cohen and colleagues have suggested that within qualitative research it might be possible to address validity through *'the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher.' (Winter 2000 in Cohen, et al. 2007: 133)*

Reliability, within qualitative research does not have to demonstrate uniformity either. It is accepted that two researchers could be researching a single setting and come up with different findings both of which could be reliable. As such reliability within qualitative research '*can be regarded as a fit between what researchers record as data and what*

actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched, i.e. a degree of accuracy and comprehensiveness of coverage.' (Bogdan and Biklen 1992: 48 in Cohen, et al. 2007: 149)

Elsewhere, it has been suggested that validity and reliability be given a new 'identity' - trustworthiness (e.g. Shenton, 2004, Golafshani, 2003). In their groundbreaking text, Naturalistic Enquiry, authors Yvonne Lincoln and Egon Guba, proposed a "palatable" and "reasonable" alternative to traditional positivist research (1985). In terms of the notion of trustworthiness, they proposed that it replace the more conventional views of reliability and validity, and that it be devolved on issues of credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In a paper, *Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects*, the author, Dr Andrew K. Shenton, describes how these criteria can be achieved to ensure the required academic rigour. Shenton reiterates the fact that the four sub-criteria of trustworthiness correspond to the criteria employed by the positivist investigator (Shenton, 2004).

In this sense, credibility is used in preference to internal validity, i.e. the idea that a study or an instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Shenton, 2004). Credibility is considered one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness (ibid). It is concerned with the researcher's confidence in the truth of the research findings, how congruent they are with reality (ibid). Credibility can be achieved in a number of ways. Shenton lists fourteen. A few examples are listed below:

- the adoption of methods well established both in qualitative investigation in general and in information science in particular;
- the development of an early familiarity with the culture of participating organisations before the first data collection dialogues take place;
- random sampling of individuals to serve as informants;
- peer scrutiny of the research project;
- the researcher's "reflective commentary";
- examination of previous research findings to assess the degree to which the project's results are congruent with those of past studies;
- background, qualifications and experience of the investigator;

- triangulation (Shenton, 2004).

In no way is Shenton prescriptive about the use of these strategies stressing that they are merely provisions that *'may be used by researchers to promote confidence that they have accurately recorded the phenomena under scrutiny*.' (Shenton, 2004: 64; my emphasis)

The second category, transferability, relates to and is used in preference to external validity/generalisability, i.e. the extent to which the results of a study can be applied to other situations. Within positivist tradition with its large samples and standardised data collection tools, generalisability can be relatively easy to demonstrate. However, as Shenton reminds us, *'the findings of a qualitative project are specific to a small number of particular environments and individuals, it is [therefore] impossible to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations.'* (2004: 69) Transferability addresses this by putting the onus on the researcher to provide sufficient contextual information, e.g. by using 'thick description' to enable the reader to make a transfer, i.e. gauge how the findings can be applicable to other contexts, settings and cultures (Shenton, 2004; Cohen, et al. 2007; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The problem with 'thick description' is what to include in it. After all, what is considered important and relevant information by one person, may not necessarily be important or relevant for someone else and vice versa (Shenton, 2004).

Nevertheless, it is important to provide as rich a description of the context as possible for the reader to decide for herself the extent to which it is transferable. It is also vitally important to be mindful of and to highlight the boundaries of the study. Shenton (2004) recommends that information relating to certain key issues be given at the outset. This includes:

a) the number of organisations taking part in the study and where they are based;

b) any restrictions in the type of people who contributed data;

c) the number of participants involved in the fieldwork;

d) the data collection methods that were employed;

e) the number and length of the data collection sessions;

f) the time period over which the data was collected. (Shenton, 2004: 70)

The next concept proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is dependability which is the interpretivists' answer to reliability, i.e. the idea that if the study was repeated, in the same context, with the same methods and with the same participants, similar results would be obtained (Shenton, 2004). For researchers working within the interpretivist tradition, reliability is challenging and epistemologically counterintuitive (Leung, 2015), it is problematic because of the changing nature of the investigated phenomena (Shenton, 2004).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose "inquiry audit" as one measure which might enhance the dependability of qualitative research. This involves an external, objective party ('auditor') to examine the inquiry process – the way in which the research was carried out – in order to evaluate the scientific rigour or systematic process of the research (ibid). However, involving an external 'auditor' may not always be feasible. A more practical method of ensuring dependability has been suggested by Shenton. He suggests that dependability can be achieved by ensuring that the processes within the study are reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results (2004: 71). A thorough understanding of the methods and their effectiveness by the reader can be achieved by including sections devoted to:

a) the research design and its implementation, describing what was planned and executed on a strategic level;

b) the operational detail of data gathering, addressing the minutiae of what was done in the field;

c) reflective appraisal of the project, evaluating the effectiveness of the process of inquiry undertaken (Shenton, 2004: 71-72)

The fourth, and final, construct in Lincoln and Guba's framework is confirmability which they suggest can be used in preference to objectivity. According to one definition, confirmability refers to the internal coherence of the data in relation to the findings, interpretations, and recommendations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994 in Bowen, 2009). To put it simply, confirmability seeks to establish a degree of neutrality in the research findings. It addresses the need to manage any potential bias or personal motivations of the researcher. In the previous chapter I tackled this in the context of classroom-based

research where the researcher is also the classroom teacher. Among other things, I considered the ethical dimensions of such a context and cautioned that it was important for the teacher researcher to be mindful of their own prejudices and biases as well as of those of their students both of which may affect the data collected. Whilst not always possible to eliminate such biases completely, by following relevant sections of the BERA Ethical Guidelines (2018), e.g. those referring to the privacy of data, ensuring anonymity and the right to withdraw from the study effects can be minimised.

Confirmability takes this two steps further. One way in which researchers can reduce their bias and thus the risk of skewing the interpretation of data is by providing an audit trail. An audit trail is a technique for establishing or increasing trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and can be defined as 'a systematically maintained documentation system' of the research project in all its aspects, including data collection and analysis (Schwandt, 2001: 8 in Bowen, 2009). It is a process whereby information about the material gathered and the processes involved in a qualitative research project is recorded and presented systematically. It includes a record of the research process as well as the theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices made by the researcher (Bowen, 2009). Audit trails allow the interested party to trace the course of the research step-by-step via the decisions made and procedures described and demonstrate that the research study's findings accurately portray participants' responses. (Shenton,2004).

Shenton (2004) also emphasises the role of triangulation in promoting confirmability and thus reducing the effect of researcher bias. One key consideration he refers to is the extent to which the researcher admits her own predispositions. It is important that beliefs relating to the selection of methods or any research decisions made are acknowledged. Explaining why one approach is favoured over another and being upfront about the weaknesses of any techniques employed helps here. Shenton (2004) adds that any preliminary theories that ultimately were not borne out by the data should also be discussed.

Another important component of establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research is authenticity. Authenticity focuses on the impact of research on members of the community being researched - on making it worthwhile (James, 2008). Lincoln and Guba identify five criteria for strengthening claims for authenticity. They include issues of fairness (ensuring that a variety of viewpoints are represented in a fair manner), ontological and educative authenticity (i.e. helping participants develop a greater understanding of the social context

being studied and helping participants appreciate viewpoints of others, respectively), and catalytic and tactical authenticity (the extent to which research has stimulated action and degree to which participants are empowered to act, respectively) (Lincoln and Guba, 1989 in James, 2008)

Ultimately, *'[i]n establishing authenticity, researchers seek reassurance that both the conduct and evaluation of research are genuine and credible not only in terms of participants' lived experiences but also with respect to the wider political and social implications of research.'* (James, 2008: 46)

What's the story?

A somewhat different take on addressing validity, reliability and generalisability in qualitative research is provided by professors F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin. In their exploratory article on 'narrative inquiry' titled 'Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry', they suggest that these 'overrated' criteria be replaced with what they believe to be 'underrated' criteria, namely, apparency and verisimilitude (a grandiose word meaning 'the appearance of being true or real') (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Highlighting narrative inquiry at this point in the discussion is useful here. Aside from the fact that it contributes to the discussion on ascertaining quality and rigour in qualitative research, aspects of this approach are also pertinent to this study. Moreover, as Connelly and Clandinin observe, narrative inquiry is increasingly used in studies of educational experience. They propose that: *[t]he main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives.' (Connelly and Clandinin 1990: 2)*

Will Storr, the author of The Science of Storytelling, shares this sentiment, proclaiming that "[s]tories are *us.*" He argues that stories are so ubiquitous that there is no way to understand the human world without them (2019).

In fact, Robert Dunbar, the renowned Professor of Evolutionary Psychology famous for his eponymous number, i.e. cognitive limit to the number of people with whom one can

maintain stable social relationships, has suggested that language evolved primarily to swap social information (Dunbar, et al, 2005). To talk about other people, their achievements and transgressions, to tell tales about moral rights and wrongs, to tell stories. Except that stories are a lot more powerful than this. The number that Dunbar is famous for is 150. That's a mere 150 individuals that humans are capable of establishing stable social relationships with. 150 individuals. And yet, there are cities of thousands and millions of people, we have also created entire nations and become the most dominant species on earth.

According to Professor Yuval Noah Harari, the acclaimed historian and writer, author of bestsellers such as Sapiens and Homo Deus, this success can be attributed to our capacity to tell stories. Stories have enabled millions of strangers to cooperate on a daily basis and to build entire civilizations. Harari claims that the myths we create and share are stronger than anyone could have imagined (2014). His arguments are quite compelling. For example, it may seem intuitive that myths, the stories that we believe in, are an invisible force that connects or divides us; and it does not always matter if they factually check out (ahem, Brexit!). And Harari agrees. "When the Agricultural Revolution opened opportunities for the creation of crowded cities and mighty empires," he says, "people invented stories about great gods, motherlands and joint stock companies to provide the needed social links" (Harari, 2014:102).

I have recently come across a proverb often attributed to Hopi American Indians. It says: "Those who tell the stories rule the world." I feel it sums up this argument quite well.

More prosaically, however, we love stories simply because they are engaging and entertaining. Or as Storr puts it: '*Good stories are explorations of the human condition; thrilling voyages into foreign minds.' (Storr, 2019: 2)*

Narrative inquiry is a study that looks at those 'thrilling voyages' of our minds trying to uncover the ways we experience the world. It *'translates into the view that education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and others' stories.' (Connelly and Clandinin 1990: 2)*

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) argue that the main attraction of using narrative as a research method is the fact that it can render life experiences, both personal and social, in relevant and meaningful ways. In terms of its importance for education, narrative inquiry

brings theoretical ideas about the nature of human life as lived to bear on educational experience as lived (ibid).

Another notable advantage of narrative inquiry is that it creates opportunities both for researchers and the researched to work collaboratively, constructing narrative as a caring community (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). It has been suggested that this can have an empowering function and lead to a sense of equitability and feelings of connectedness between participants '*that are developed in situations of equality, caring and mutual purpose and intention.'* (Hogan, 1988:12 in Connelly and Clandinin, 1990)

This empowerment also comes from the voice that narrative inquiry affords participants. The concept of voice features prominently within narrative inquiry. In their paper Connelly and Clandinin cite Deborah Britzman, a professor at York University, whose research connects psychoanalysis with contemporary pedagogy. Britzman (1991[9]) wrote:

> *'Voice is meaning that resides in the individual and enables that individual to participate in a community.... The struggle for voice begins when a person attempts to communicate meaning to someone else. Finding the words, speaking for oneself, and feeling heard by others are all a part of this process... Voice suggests relationships: the individual's relationship to the meaning of her/his experience and hence, to language, and the individual's relationship to the other, since understanding is a social process.' (in Connelly and Clandinin, 1990:4)*

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) argue that it is essential that all participants have voice within the research relationship and that they have the time and space to tell their story so that it too gains the authority and validity that the research story has long had.

Much has changed since Britzman wrote those words. Within the further education (FE) sector, for example, providers are expected to have a 'Learner Involvement Strategy' - an initiative introduced in September 2007 as part of a wider programme of change and personalisation within FE to ensure that provision meets the needs of students (Walker

[9] Britzman's book was in print at the time of their writing, hence the discrepancy in publication dates.

and Logan, 2008). However, there is a feeling that, we as teachers, may only be paying a lip service to it. In a publication titled 'All you ever wanted to know about learning and teaching: But were too cool to ask', the author, Professor Frank Coffield, quotes a student who says *'Teachers claim they listen to students but they don't really.'* (2009: 55). Unsurprisingly, Coffield argues that it is important that we as teachers change this perception. And for good reason, too. Students, Coffield points out, are a good source of 'information, ideas and good will' waiting for staff to tap into (2009: 55). Listening to what they have to say in a systematic and sensitive way and responding to it appropriately is a way to self-improvement and self-evaluation (ibid). Drawing on his experience Coffield proposes that an interactive combination of discussion groups and learning logs is a far more powerful technique for accessing the 'voice of learners' than questionnaires. (Coffield, 2009: 55). Coffield also made sure that he got to know his students and gave them the opportunity to read the first draft report. Not only did this allow him to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of his data (e.g. he could check on the accuracy and fairness of his interpretations, the representativeness of certain views and the persistence of problems they had identified); but also by creating conditions where his participants' voice could be heard, he was able to establish a more equal relationship with them - a relationship in which learning could be seen as a shared responsibility (ibid). Coffield recognises that the potential gains of listening to learners and capturing their a voice are considerable. He backs up this assertion with a quotation from Rudduck and McIntyre who found that when students *'find themselves treated as partners in the educational enterprise, not merely as its objects, they can come to see themselves as members with a stake in the enterprise' (2007: 142 in Coffield, 2009: 55).*

However, like other types of qualitative research, narrative inquiry is not immune to criticism. In fact, because of its unique focus on storytelling where the narrative is mutually and collaboratively constructed and reconstructed as the research progresses, ensuring trustworthiness and credibility is particularly important. In an article, Reflections on the Narrative Research Approach, Professor Torill Moen suggests that the researcher working within this tradition may have to contend with several dilemmas (2006). The first one relates to interpretation. As cited earlier, Coffield talks about discussing draft reports with his research participants in order to check for accuracy and fairness of his interpretations (2009). But what happens when the researcher and the research subjects diverge on the interpretation of some key events. Do the participants always have a better appreciation of their actions than the researcher and should their accounts thus be

accepted as correct? Moen's solution is simple - include both accounts in the report, i.e. that of the researcher as well as those of the participants. She argues that this multivoicedness of the narrative would enhance transparency and '*appear more clearly than it would if the researcher and the research subject have a joint understanding of the narratives that occur during the inquiry process.' (Moen, 2006:62)*

In a similar vein, Connelly and Clandinin, warn us to be wary of the danger of "the Hollywood plot" where everything works out well in the end (1990). They point out that "wellness" in a study may be 'a thorough and unbending censure' or 'a distillation of drops of honey' (1990:10) - a kind of 'narrative smoothing' which occurs in narrative during data collection and writing (ibid). The challenge with narrative smoothing is that of balance. Namely, is the smoothing contained in the plot balanced with what is obscured in the smoothing for narrative purposes? Or, in other words, as much as it is important to attend to the stories as told, a careful reader must equally be alert to the 'narrative secrets' - the untold stories (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990:10).

But there's more. Another dilemma described by Moen is the issue of 'true' narrative. Without relevant checks and balances in place, narrative inquiry may be open to abuse. Moen suggests that narratives can differ depending on the audience which raises the question of whether they are true (2006). However, she explains that this question may, in fact, be irrelevant. She points out that one fundamental claim of narrative research is the fact that there is no static and everlasting truth; rather there are different subjective positions from which the world is experienced (Peshkin, 1988, 1991 in Moen, 2006: 63). Her position seems consistent with that of Connelly and Clandinin who observe that storytelling is a dynamic process in which we, as teachers and researchers, tell our life stories as they are 'lived, told, relived and retold' (1990: 9). Stories change and their meaning shifts over time as we engage in a reflective research process. The collaborative aspect of creating narratives also means that our stories change as we tell and retell them to one another often picking ideas, inspiration and new ways of looking at things from others as our research progresses. In their view, it is a complex process which gives rise to "plurivocality" - the multiple "I's" in narrative. Just as we wear many hats in our lives (metaphorically speaking), the "I" in narrative inquiry could be the voice of a researcher, teacher, participant, man, woman, and so on and so forth. But even though all these voices belong to one person, it is important to decide which of them is the dominant one when we write "I" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990).

Moen admits that not everyone is satisfied with this position and the question about the truth is a recurring theme within the literature on narrative research on educational practice (Goodson, 1992; Gudmundsdottir, 1997; Heikkinen, 2002; Phillips, 1997 in Moen, 2006). Those who reject this position claim that to be considered acceptable, narrative must be true (Phillips, 1997, in Moen, 2006). This is particularly important at times when policy or future actions rely on the acceptance of the narrative. They claim that the reason why truth may sometimes be difficult to ascertain is because '*we do not always know, or are not always aware of or honest about, the reasons underlying our actions.'* (Moen, 2006: 63) Another reason could be because we may actually believe the fiction we create. Or, as Harari explains, we create fictional narratives of who we are. *'[T]he self [he claims] is a fictional story that the intricate mechanisms of our mind constantly manufacture, update and rewrite.'* (Harari, 2018: 349) This becomes apparent when one looks at our Facebook feeds where the storylines we construct about our lives seem perfect. Perfect families, perfect houses, perfect holidays with perfect weather, etc., etc. According to Harari, 99% of what we actually experience never becomes part of this story (2018). In fact, we often become so attached to our perfect online selves that we end up mistaking them for the truth about ourselves (ibid). Harari notes that our fantasy self (e.g. the idyllic sunset on a beach) tends to be visual whereas the actual experiences (e.g. mosquito bites) are corporeal (ibid). In effect, the perfect pictures we take on holidays become our memories.

Incidentally, this seems consistent with research carried out by Gabrielle Oettingen (2014) we referred to in Chapter two. To remind the reader, Oettingen showed that fantasizing or creating visual images of ourselves achieving goals tricks the brain into believing that they have actually been achieved. Oettingen argued that this often impedes our ability to complete those goals as we settle for the fantasies (2014).

The solution suggested by Moen is essentially a form of audit trail I described above. She suggests that the account of an outsider may be more truthful than the first-person account (Moen, 2006).

Others (e.g. Denzin, 1989 in Moen, 2006) have asserted that narratives are in fact fictional statements which to a varying degree, are about real lives. They argue that the collaborative nature of producing stories and narratives causes the parties (i.e. the researcher and the participants) to remove themselves from the real lived event and is essentially a process of recording memories of events and how they were experienced.

They also characterise the notions of facts, facilities and fiction where facts are actual events, facilities describe how the facts were lived and experienced and fiction, curiously, is a *'truthful narrative that deals with the facts and facilities, and is faithful to them both'* (Moen, 2006: 63) and conclude that *'[t]rue stories are, thus, stories that are believed'* (Moen, 2006: 63).

Connelly and Clandinin refer to this as "narrative truth". Drawing on the work of Donald Spence (1982) they remind us that "narrative truth" consists of "continuity," "closure," "aesthetic finality," and a sense of "conviction" - qualities often associated both with fictional literature and with something well done (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990: 8). They admit that in their studies they use the notions of adequacy and plausibility where a plausible account is one that tends to ring true. They also acknowledge that although fantasy may be an invitational element in fictional narrative, plausibility exerts firmer tugs in empirical narratives (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990: 8).

Ultimately though, as Moen reminds us when ascertaining whether or not a story is true we must not neglect the quality of the study (2006). In fact, in many ways quality and truth go hand in hand. The challenge, as with all qualitative methods, is how best to do it. This seems to be a prevalent concern among researchers operating within this tradition (e.g. Creswell, 1998; Krathwohl, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Wolcott, 1990, mentioned in Moen, 2006). I have already discussed the inappropriacy of using quantitative methods and terminology within the qualitative research tradition suggesting other terminology that can be used instead. As we have seen Connelly and Clandinin suggest that we use the 'underrated criteria' of apparency and verisimilitude instead of the 'overrated criteria' of validity, reliability and generalisability. I summed up the last chapter stating that *we should look at ourselves in relationship with other participants particularly with regards to our motivations and values and ensure that we engage in research with conviction and integrity.* This statement referred primarily to ethical considerations; however, it seems evident that it applies here too.

Moen reminds us that *'the researcher has to be candid and at all times aware of her or his subjectivity.' (2006: 64)* Referring to Wolcott (1990), she argues that it is the qualitative researchers' duty to always strive "to not get it all wrong" and suggests that '*narrative research is trustworthy or reliable because of the extensive data generation procedures and the entire narrative research process (...).' (Moen, 2006:64)*

Connelly and Clandinin sound a note of caution warning that '*[f]alsehood may be substituted for meaning and narrative truth by using the same criteria that give rise to significance, value, and intention. Not only may one "fake the data" and write a fiction but one may also use the data to tell a deception as easily as a truth.'* (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990:10)

The implications - can I be trusted?

Earlier in the chapter discussion of the lengths to which researchers working within the qualitative research tradition go to ensure the rigour and quality of their research was presented. Trustworthiness, with its four subcategories of credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability, was identified as a concept that can take on the more conventional quantitative criteria of reliability and validity (Lincoln and Guba 1985, Shenton, 2004). Trustworthiness, therefore, seems like a good place to start when reflecting on my own research design. Shenton's practical description of each of the subcategories in particular serves as a useful framework here.

So, can I be trusted? Let's find out.

Starting with credibility, Shenton suggested fourteen ways in which credibility can be demonstrated some of which are listed in this chapter. Going through the list I feel confident that some of them are met (Shenton stresses that not all have to be met (Shenton, 2004)). Take 'the development of an early familiarity with the culture of participating organisations'. There are essentially two organisations involved in this project - one is the charity that runs it, which also happens to be the organisation that employs me, and the other is the school that hosts the classes; and I believe that I am familiar with both. In terms of the former, I have worked for this charity for 12 years as Head of Learning and Senior Tutor. In addition to teaching, one of my responsibilities is project development and management. This puts me in a unique position where, on the one hand, I have to be able to identify a local need and think of the most effective ways to respond to it, and on the other, convince the funders as to why the need should be addressed and that our way is the best way to do it. It also requires me to develop and

maintain relationships with various stakeholders such as the said school with which I had worked for two years prior to starting this study.

The next criterion my research design meets is ‘random sampling of individuals’. Admittedly, the sample is small and does not fully represent the wider population, for example, it comprises mostly women migrants which will mean findings in relation to this group in particular will be reflected in my recommendations. However, ‘randomness’ was ensured through the ways in which participants effectively self-selected with limited intervention from me. Other than setting the class level, I had no control over who was included. Moreover, participation in the study was voluntary, with participants having the option to opt out without their learner status being affected.

I carried out a comprehensive literature review and the next chapter reports the extent to which my study’s results are consistent with past studies meeting the need for congruence. According to Shenton (2004), the researcher’s own background and experience can support credibility. At this point, it is probably worth pointing out that this is not my first foray into research. Ever since completing my master’s degree, I have always felt that the best way to develop professionally is not through doing endless courses but through engaging in practitioner research. To this end, my modest contribution to research includes five studies, four of which have been published in peer reviewed journals (Lewandowski, 2017; Lewandowski, 2015; Lewandowski, 2008; Lewandowski, 2007).

Shenton also mentions triangulation to which I will come back later.

Transferability is another important subcategory of trustworthiness which Lincoln and Guba suggested (1985). Shenton (2004) argues that transferability can be achieved by providing ‘thick description’ to allow the reader to decide for herself whether the findings of one study can be applied in other contexts. Usefully, he also made a number of recommendations as to what to include in such a description. This chapter contains a detailed description which covers several of them. For instance, a detailed description of the local context in which this study took place is included (a comprehensive discussion about the wider issues of migration, global and local, are also discussed in chapter 1). This includes the demographic and socio-economic information of the area and highlights the glaring disparities between different parts of the borough. This also serves as an explanation for why the ESOL classes are usually where they are. Sadly, such inequalities

are not unique to the area I describe. ESOL teachers and various outreach workers up and down the country will be all too familiar with such contexts. The school hosting the classes is an important part of this context hence the discussion about the potential motivations for getting involved and the role it played in fostering community cohesion which some readers may find instructive. Finally, the context would not be complete without reference to the course and the students. Both are important for anyone trying to decide whether or not the context is transferable. At this point the data included relates largely to participants' ethnic background, language level, age, gender and employment status, a more in-depth discussion about their motivations and aspirations has yet to follow.

Next up are dependability and confirmability. There is a degree of overlap between the two concepts which merits looking at them together. Both dependability and confirmability require a detailed description of the processes within the study and a record of these processes respectively. These criteria are addressed by providing a detailed description of the design of the study and its implementation. This description can be found at the beginning of this chapter. The theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices I made with regards to this study along with a justification of these choices can be found in Chapter three. The next chapter presents an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the process of inquiry undertaken. This provides the requisite audit trail for interested parties to trace the course of the research step-by-step via the decisions made and procedures described. Needless to say, such reflective appraisal is an integral part of any study let alone a PhD one.

Now, let us circle back to a concept mentioned earlier - triangulation. As discussed, Shenton (2004) argued that triangulation plays an important role not only in establishing credibility but also in promoting confirmability. Just to remind the reader, triangulation requires the researcher to draw from multiple and different sources of data to corroborate the same fact or finding (Moen, 2006). My sources include:

- the goal books which capture information relating to the types of goals learners set, the frequency and consistency with which these goals are set, the consistency with which they are completed;
- participant questionnaires which survey their attitudes to setting goals and its impact on language practice;

- case studies which allow for a more in depth analysis of participants' engagement with goal setting.

Did it work? - presenting the data

Earlier in this chapter I introduced the participants and the context in which this study takes place. I also outlined the procedure for goal setting in an ESOL classroom and in chapter two I argued that goal setting can be an effective way to facilitate independent language learning outside of the classroom. Now is the moment of truth - the time to consider whether or not this 'experiment' actually worked.

To gauge the success of the study, let us first consider the participants' responses to the questionnaire. As mentioned earlier, the questionnaire comprised 14 items which explored learners' engagement with goal setting and provided answers to the research questions. The questions were written in a way that would allow participants to answer with a simple 'yes or no' but also prompted longer responses. For the purposes of presenting the data, I will initially summarise the shorter, yes/no, answers. At this point, I will refer to the longer responses only to seek clarification and confirmation that the participant understood the question. These longer responses along with a greater analysis of the actual goals learners set in their goal books and case studies will form basis for a detailed discussion which will take place in the next chapter.

Rather than looking at each of the questionnaire questions one at a time, I have clustered them under their corresponding research questions. This will give the reader the impression of how each of the research questions have been answered and an indication as to whether or not this study has been successful.

In total 12 questionnaires from 12 participants have been collected. The first question on the questionnaire asked participants to declare whether or not they used goal books and whether they found them useful. All participants confirmed that this indeed was the case - they had used the goal book and found using it useful.

When trying to establish the extent to which setting goals led to an increased sense of agency and autonomy in ESOL learners (the first research question), I asked learners two questions. One, 'Did you feel more in charge of your learning?' and two, 'Did you look forward to completing your goals every week or was it something you felt you had to do but didn't want to?' Their responses indicate that setting goals can lead to an increased sense of autonomy. Out of the 12 responses 8 confirmed that they felt more in charge of their learning, 1 said no, 1 did not answer at all and 2 responses were unclear. 10 out of 12 participants also confirmed that they looked forward to completing their goals. 2 responses were unclear.

There is also good evidence supporting the notion that goal setting can help to motivate ESOL learners to practise language skills in their own time through self-directed study (research question two)**.** Two questions probed this hypothesis. Answers to the first of them (Did you find that writing your own goals motivated you to study more?) provide the strongest support for the goals' potential to motivate learners to study with 10 out of 12 of them responding in the affirmative to this question (2 responses were unclear). However, the response to the second question (Would you have been doing these things if you hadn't been asked to write your goals?) and its subsequent interpretation is a little more problematic. 4 participants answered NO (confirming that the language practice they completed in their own time were the result of setting goals) and 3 said Yes (arguing that the contrary was the case), another 3 participants said Yes, but their longer responses indicated that they, in fact, meant NO, i.e. they admitted that they practised English more as a result of goal setting (e.g. *YES, I use more English outside of the class because it is very important new English [sic])*. One person did not understand the question and one was unsure.

In terms of the third research question - impact of goal setting on the time spent using English outside of the classroom, learners seem to be much more unanimous in their assessment. Two questions dealt with this issue. We have already seen that goal setting can motivate learners to study more outside the classroom. It also appears that learners feel that they use English more outside of the classroom when they set goals. 11 out of 12 students said YES when asked 'Did you find that writing your own goals motivated you to use more English?' This could be because they were more likely to plan their language use outside the classroom. All 12 students responded YES to the question: Did [goal setting] make you think about how and when to use English?

Finally, the last research question looked at the extent to which goal setting can help ESOL learners improve their language skills as specified in their course goals. To explore this question, I first asked learners if they managed to complete both their weekly and course goals. In both cases the majority of learners confirmed that they had completed their goals, although some of them struggled to do it every week. Overall 6 participants confirmed that they completed their goals on a weekly basis, 4 managed to do it almost every week (2 answers were unclear). They were more positive about achieving their course goals with 9 learners confirming that they had achieved them, 2 felt they had achieved them to some extent and one was unsure. All of which had a positive impact on their perceived language skills. All 12 participants felt that setting goals resulted in better English language skills. Moreover, setting weekly goals also benefited the learners in other ways. As many as 11 of them felt that they had achieved something special or important to them because they had written it as a goal.

The above responses, although not always uniform, appear to support the premise that goal setting was beneficial for this group of learners. However, I am cognizant of the fact that these numbers are nothing more than mere indications and do not tell the whole story. The next chapter builds on this initial analysis. Consideration of the longer responses, case studies and an analysis of learners' goals in order gain a fuller understanding of their engagement with the goal setting methodology is explored.

Epilogue

After almost two and a half hours the session is drawing to a close. Two and a half hours may sound like a long time to some but time is relative and these learners have barely noticed it. Yes, they are a little fatigued from their near constant focus but there's also something else. Confidence? Satisfaction from a job well done? A sense of accomplishment? All of the above? It's that feeling one gets after a long run or a gruelling session in the gym.

Without realising it, for the past two and a half hours they've not only been engaging in various linguistic and cognitive gymnastics, honing their language skills, but also, unwittingly, they've been engaging in building a community with shared goals and values.

The session may be coming to an end but as they begin to shuffle to pack their belongings away, they know that practising English does not have to be confined inside the tall walls of this spacious classroom. As the chatter between them surges in volume and their thoughts turn to their children and afternoon chores, they are leaving ready to explore the language learning opportunities around them and take on the challenges they've set for themselves.

Despite the gloomy weather, their minds are buzzing with enthusiasm and eagerness to apply what they have learned, and they are ready to step back outside and brave the pouring rain.

Chapter 5 (discussion) - Voices

"Arriving at one goal is the starting point to another."

John Dewey

Prologue

Eva

"I love this book. It gives me ideas to write about. There's one idea per day. It's great!" Eva is excited. At 31, Eva, a mother of one, wants to continue to study in the UK. She started her degree 'back home' but had to put it on hold when she met her husband, came to the UK and had a baby. Now that her son is a little older, she hopes to revisit her dream and complete her degree. This time, however, she won't be doing it just for herself. Her family is important to her and she wants to do it also for them. Eva realises that if she is to have a chance of securing a place at university, she must work on her writing skills. Earlier in the week she had been to the library and picked up two books to help her with her goals. "365 writing ideas" is one of them. The other one is a grammar book by Scott Thornbury. Now back in the classroom, Eva is keen to share and talk about her 'finds' with her classmate. She talks excitedly about the different ways to describe a chair, "Show don't tell," she explains attempting to describe it. Her friend listens and nods understandingly. They are not the only couple talking about their 'homework'. Except that homework this was not. At least not in the traditional sense where the teacher sets tasks for students to complete at home. Across the room, I can hear students talking about the new vocabulary they've learnt, articles they've read, things they've written… tasks set not by the teacher, but by the learners themselves for themselves.

This chapter explores our goals and motivations, aspirations and the sacrifices we make to achieve them. It is about students like Eva who, by choice or circumstance, have made this country their new home. It is about taking control over decisions relating to learning -

an important aspect of their lives. This chapter also captures their unique experiences and stories providing a forum for their voices to be heard.

Introduction

In the last chapter we got the first glimpse of what can be achieved when learners are entrusted with taking ownership of their own learning; when they are given the space and time to consider their own priorities as well as the tools to achieve them. As we saw, a language classroom does not have to be the only place where learners learn and use English and teachers do not have to be the only purveyors of knowledge. We also saw that adult learners are perfectly capable of organising their own learning. It sounds obvious but perhaps this statement is not as self-evident as it sounds. Of course, we can organise our own learning. We're adults, right? And yet, when it comes to it, many of us struggle. We looked at some of the culprits in chapter two. For example, as adults we often have responsibilities and commitments that naturally take precedence over everything else. That aside, we still find it difficult to get round to learning even when we do manage to find some time in our busy schedules. We are, after all, fine-tuned creatures of habits. Any attempt to replace our regular 7 p.m. Netflix fix with a learning session will inevitably lead to a pushback in the form of procrastination. We simply like our present selves more than our future selves and give in to the feel good (Pychyl, 2013). We also live in stimulus rich environments and easily get sidetracked and distracted from learning (Steel, et. al. 2018). Finally, we settle for the fantasies we create about our future accomplishments instead of working towards them (Oettingen, 2014).

The data presented in the previous chapter showed us that goals can serve as an effective motivational tool when placed in the hands of busy adult ESOL learners. It may only have been a glimpse, but it gave us a tantalizing promise that with a few simple changes to the way we use Individual Learning Plans - a document that is already widely used in the education sector - we can facilitate learning outside of the classroom and create a culture where learners take the responsibility for their own learning and for practising English. A culture where learners are more likely to step outside of their comfort zones and become more open to experiences in the process. Those few tweaks have the

potential to effect a positive change to the way our learners think about themselves not only as learners but also as members of a wider society.

In this chapter, I pick up where I left off in Chapter 4 continuing the discussion and delving deeper into learner motivations for setting and completing their goals. An analysis of their longer responses along with data from learner interviews are presented in order to develop an understanding of learners' attitudes to setting goals, their routines and barriers to learning. Later in the chapter, the goals themselves will be analysed and a discussion centred on the hopes and aspirations of adult ESOL learners in the context of migration, integration and community cohesion is built.

The findings introduced in the previous chapter will form the initial basis for the discussion with the research questions providing the structure.

Taking charge - agency and autonomy

Question 1: To what extent can goal setting lead to an increased sense of agency and autonomy in ESOL learners?

The first research question, as the reader may remember, related to the extent to which setting goals led to an increased sense of agency and autonomy in ESOL learners. Autonomy is an important concept in education and one that I have to admit I did not give sufficient attention to when reviewing the literature for this thesis - even though it was included in my research question! It is a concept that as a teacher I instinctively know should be promoted and understand why. Some of the more obvious reasons being that it helps our students develop the ability to organise their own learning in the absence of a teacher. Learning autonomously makes for more personalised, and thus, relevant learning and it is a transferable skill valued by employers. Trouble is, I just took it for granted.

What I was not aware of at the time was the wealth of literature on the subject of autonomy, nor indeed its complex nature or history.

Edward L. Deci, who we met in chapter two, claims that autonomy is essential to gaining competence. This is because autonomy promotes intrinsic motivation without which

gaining competence would be a much more arduous process, or as Deci puts it: *'(...) gaining competence on its own is not enough. To be a competent pawn, to be effective but not to feel truly volitional and self-determined at the activity you can do so well, does not promote intrinsic motivation and general well-being.'* (Deci & Flaste, 1995:70) He adds that '*perceived competence must be accompanied by the experience of autonomy for the most positive results.'* (Deci & Flaste, 1995:70)

Moreover, it seems that interest in the subject matter and willingness to learn are the necessary individual prerequisites for successful learning as they enable students to engage in deeper level learning processes (Andre & Windschitl, 2003; Pintrich, 2003; Pintrich, Marx, & Boyle, 1993; Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon, & Barch, 2004; Ryan & Powelson, 1991 in Furtak and Kutner, 2012). Therefore, affording students more autonomy over their own learning process may help them to engage in meaningful learning activities and ultimately achieve favourable development and learning outcomes. (Furtak and Kutner 2012)

Autonomy also features prominently in language learning. In a study on Motivation and Autonomy in Learning English as Foreign Language, researchers Jorge Cevallos and colleagues argue that autonomy plays an important role in the process of learning a second language because it '*allows learners to materialize their learning aspirations through hard work and persistent dedication.'* (Cevallos, et al, 2017: 101) Whether independently or in collaboration with others, an autonomous learner will take more responsibility for learning and is more likely to be more effective than a learner who is reliant on the teacher (Cevallos, et al, 2017). Autonomy is not a new concept, either. As early as 1978, in a book titled 'Successful language learners: What do we know about them?', researcher A. C. Omaggio proposes 7 key characteristics and behaviours of autonomous learners which make them more effective at learning languages. They are as follows:

1. autonomous learners have insights into their learning styles and strategies;
2. take an active approach to the learning task at hand;
3. are willing to take risks, i.e., to communicate in the target language at all costs;
4. are good guessers;

5. attend to form as well as to content, that is, place importance on accuracy as well as appropriacy;
6. develop the target language into a separate reference system and are willing to revise and reject hypotheses and rules that do not apply; and
7. have a tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language. (Omaggio, 1978 cited in Thanasoulas, 2000)

This list serves as a good reminder of why teachers should promote autonomy; however, curiously, for all the talk about why learner autonomy is important, I never really asked what it actually is. Intuitively, I know that it has something to do with working on your own, independently of the teacher which the list above seems to confirm. But what is the actual definition?

This is why before we continue the discussion about the relationship between setting goals and autonomy any further, let us first consider what autonomy actually is. For it is not as straightforward a question as it appears. In fact, learner autonomy comes in many guises such as ‘independent learning’, ‘self-directed learning’, ‘self-organised learning’, ‘learner independence’ and so on and so forth.

One of the most enduring definitions of learner autonomy has been proposed by Henri Holec who is widely considered to be the father of autonomy (Moss, 2019). Holec describes it as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (Holec, 1981: 3 in Palfreyman & Smith, 2003). This definition is perhaps most consistent with our own intuitions about autonomy. Phil Benson, an Associate Professor in English and author of Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning, has noted that variations on this general theme have been put forward where ‘take charge of’ may be replaced with ‘take more responsibility for or control of’ and ‘the ability’ by ‘capacity’ (2007). However, regardless of the wording, it is difficult to escape the impression that this is a rather simplistic view of autonomy. It is little wonder therefore that others have attempted to provide a more ‘comprehensive’ definition of autonomy.

For example, Associate Professor Lisa Legault has suggested an extended definition of autonomy that looks at it from a psychological perspective. For her autonomy is more than an ability, she describes it as a ‘critical psychological need’. Legault’s definition converges with Holec’s in that it acknowledges the role of self-direction as well as

importance of being self-governed. However, like Deci, she also recognises that volition plays an important part in fostering autonomy:

> *'Autonomy is a critical psychological need. It denotes the experience of volition and self-direction in thought, feeling, and action. It refers to the perception of being self-governed rather than controlled by external forces.' (Legault, 2016:1)*

The sense of volition was also an important aspect in the design of this study. Naturally, it was autonomy in Holec's sense that I wanted learners to develop but I also felt that volition had a big part to play. I hoped to achieve this by giving learners the freedom to decide for themselves what their goals were going to be as well as the mechanics of achieving them, such as the scheduling of tasks and activities related to their goals.

As mentioned above my first research question looked at the extent to which setting goals led to an increased sense of agency and autonomy in ESOL learners. I asked learners two questions. One, 'did you feel more in charge of your learning?' and two, 'Did you look forward to completing your goals every week or was it something you felt you had to do but didn't want to?' The initial analysis of students' responses rendered positive results indicating that setting goals can lead to an increased sense of autonomy. It is worth reminding the reader that out of the 12 responses 8 confirmed that they felt more in charge of their learning, 1 said no, 1 did not answer at all and 2 responses were unclear. 10 out of 12 participants also confirmed that they looked forward to completing their goals. 2 responses were unclear. When interpreting the longer responses, one has to bear in mind that they were written by students learning English which means that their answers were not always sufficiently clear as evidenced in the results above. Neither were they very elaborate. As discussed in the previous chapter, I tried to mitigate this by encouraging learners to reflect on their learning process and discuss the questions together before answering them.

On the whole, the analysis of the longer answers confirms the findings above. Most learners responded confidently about being in charge of their own learning. For example, the following responses demonstrate a growing sense of volition and agency:

> "*Yes I felt that I was taking initiative for my learning by doing my goals every week."*
> or

"Yes, I'm manager of my learning." or *"[...] I [am] in charge [of] what I need to learn like spelling, tenses how to [use]"*

In addition to the growing sense of agency, some responses also reveal a social dimension to autonomy with several learners referring to interactions with friends, neighbours or members of the family, for example:

"Yes I felt more in charge of my learning because my speaking is very slow. So I can talk to my son, neighbour, friends in English."

"Yes I was in charge of my learning. I was keeping myself [in touch] with English whether it was listening English news, reading books or speaking to my friends."

This is an interesting finding. Note that learners made these references to friends and neighbours spontaneously as answers to a simple question, namely: *Did you feel more in charge of your learning? If so, how?* Learners were asked to respond yes or no and give an example and were otherwise unprompted.

In her 2011 paper titled "Identity, motivation and autonomy in second language acquisition from the perspective of complex adaptive systems" author, Professor Vera Lúcia Menezes de Oliveira e Paiva argues that autonomy is in fact a socio-cognitive system nested in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) system which in addition to our mental states and processes also involves political, social and economic dimensions (2011). She argues that autonomy is not a state, instead *'it is a non-linear process, which undergoes periods of instability, variability and adaptability.'* (Paiva, 2011: 63) As such it is an essential element in SLA because '*it triggers the learning process through learners' agency and leads the system beyond the classroom.'* (Paiva, 2011: 63) This is precisely what I hoped to achieve when setting out on this journey.

It seems that encouraging learners to set their own goals activated this process. The social element Paiva refers to was, in fact, something that the majority of the participants wanted to achieve as part of their long-term goals. In fact, as many as 9 (out of 11) stated that the ability to communicate effectively with other members of their communities was an important course goal for them. However, it appears that the social dimension has many aspects to which learners assign varied importance. Take the following course goal from the learner's goal book for example:

"It's very important I speak with someone and I want to buy something I want to ask about something how I should ask to someone in English."

This example illustrates that the social dimension is clearly important to this learner, however, it also highlights her desire to be independent and is an acknowledgement that this independence requires a level of linguistic competence that she currently lacks.

Compare this with the following three goals:

"I want to improve my speaking and can communicate with people."

"I want to know and understand exactly what people says."

"I want to learn English and improve my English then I will speak to other people easily."

Unlike the previous example which focuses on an instrumental aspect of language learning, these goals are more integrative in nature. They recognise the value of interpersonal contacts within neighbourhoods in mitigating the adverse effect of ethnic diversity on trust which Sturgis and colleagues referred to in their 2014 paper. Moreover, for these learners improving language skills is a ticket to a world in which they are full and active participants. One in which they can take advantage of all the opportunities - social and otherwise - afforded to them which thus far they may have been denied. Although this is not explicitly stated, these goals also highlight a perennial problem for many members of minority groups - a problem of perceived isolation from the wider society. Stated as they are, these goals express a yearning to change this. Addressing them will put these learners in the mainstream of the society where they belong rather than on its outskirts where they feel they are now.

Finally, there is a dimension where social contact is not a goal in and of itself but a means to achieving it. It is a dimension where the interaction is used for one's personal albeit linguistic gains:

"I will speak to my neighbour to improve my speaking."

Whilst this might sound like a cynical, self-serving and opportunistic way of exploiting spontaneous neighbourly interactions, it is in fact a valid and important language learning strategy. Paiva holds, *'[a]utonomous learners take advantage of the linguistic affordances in their environment and act by engaging themselves in second language social practices.'* (2011: 63) Committing to speaking to a neighbour to practise English is precisely what she means. It is also unlikely that small talk with a neighbour would be perceived as purely self-serving by any party involved. In fact, any interaction between members of different communities is more likely to break barriers and be conducive to creating a more cohesive society irrespective of the initial intentions.

A careful reader may have noticed that the last goal feels qualitatively different from the previous 4 goals listed. And she would be right. Although this learner recorded this particular goal as her long term (course) goal, goals like this are more likely to be recorded as weekly goals which support longer term goals. In addition to supporting the long-term goals, the role of the support goals is to identify and tap into the linguistic affordances that Paiva was referring to. An analysis of the support goals reveals that learners did indeed think about opportunities around them. Not surprisingly given the number of learners referring to social goals as their long-term goals, many of them included social interactions as their support goals. They typically involved friends, family members (including children) and members of the public (people), e.g.:

"I will go to park and speak to friends;"

"I am going to my friend home I will speak in English;"

"going to talk to my daughter to improve my speaking;"

"I try to speak with my son in English;"

"I should speak with my husband;"

"try to talk more with people;"

This, in some cases, involved deliberate attempts to make friends in order to practise English with them, e.g.

> *"I will try find new friends in the class talk with them."*
>
> *"I will find some friends to speak to them."*

Any situation which brings people together and allows them to interact with one another has the potential to create acquaintanceships and even friendships. ESOL courses where learners meet frequently over an extended period of time are particularly conducive to friendship forming. In fact, so prevalent is this phenomenon that this fact is often highlighted in promotional literature as one of the benefits of joining a course, e.g.: *Learn English, gain new skills, and make new friends this January: ESOL classes at City Lit (City Lit),* or *Improve your English, make new friends, learn about British culture and enjoy yourself! (Active Learning).*

These learners, like many others before them, simply recognise that to learn English you have to use it and in order to use it you have to have someone to use it with. Although making friends may not have been their main reason for joining the course, they realise that being in a class with people who share their goals, provides opportunities to connect with them and engage in mutually beneficial interactions outside of the classroom.

However, the friendship making potential of an ESOL class environment must not be taken for granted. Learners' personal circumstances, family commitments or personal disposition may mean that some learners will find it difficult to make friends or to keep in touch with their peers outside of the class. For others, the reason for not making friends may be much more prosaic - they may simply not find their peers sufficiently interesting.

Babak[10]

Take Babak (not his real name) for example. In his mid-twenties, this young refugee from Iran, is highly ambitious. Before seeking refuge in the UK, Babak lived a comfortable life in his own country where he was a respected engineer, website designer, concert pianist and a gifted swimmer. All this changed literally overnight. He knew something was wrong when on his way back from a break in the mountains he turned on his phone and saw numerous missed calls from his parents. When he finally managed to talk to them, he was told that the secret police had visited his house and were asking about him. Although he did not know what this may have been about, Babak decided to head straight for the Turkish border having heard stories about people disappearing never to be heard from again. Instead of going back home to his comfortable middle-class life, he began a three-month journey to the UK. Now safe in the UK, Babak wants to rebuild his life. He knows that it is not going to be easy. He is aware that his language skills need to improve and he's prepared to work hard to achieve this. When he joined the course, Babak knew why he was there: "*I want to know and understand what exactly people say"*, he wrote in his goal book. In week four (his first week in the class), Babak also wrote: "*I find some friends to speak to them".* This was his first and last such entry in the goal book. In an interview I carried out with Babak after the course, he admitted that he had very little in common with the other learners who were mostly young mothers (not to mention the fact that it would have been inappropriate for him to try to socialize with them outside of the class). But this was not the only reason why he did not make friends with the other students. Babak's focus on accuracy meant that he was looking for conversation partners whose English was better than his; who could model the language for him. He felt that he needed to be challenged linguistically and feared that interactions with weaker learners may make his own language skills regress. The entries in his goal book reveal that he used a different strategy to achieve this goal. Instead of looking for interlocutors, he decided to take advantage of resources that he could access on his phone. These were the British

[10] Two detailed case studies have been produced for this thesis. All participants were asked to volunteer for the case studies. The two presented here are the ones who came forward.

Council Podcast and English Stories: *“I use 2 different applications on my phone 1. British council podcast 2. listen English story and I listen to them everyday and night and if I don't understand I can look at the sentences and correct myself.”*

These apps provided the language model Babak was looking for. Critically, however, he also made sure that rather than being a passive ‘consumer’ of these stories, he engaged with them actively by focusing on aspects of the language he was not familiar with. This allowed him to address gaps in his own knowledge and to make progress. Although, as he acknowledges, it is a continuing process for him: “*and it's going to be better but it's still an ongoing process for me.”*

What I find interesting about Babak’s case is the way he approached and responded to this initial setback. When he realised that he was not going to be able to find suitable conversation partners in the class, rather than giving up on the goal he adapted and found a different way of achieving it. And he was not the only person to do so. For example, another learner, let us call her Shivani, shows similar adaptability. When her planned meeting with a classmate (*I will meet up to [Kuldip] for the chat on over this weekend*) has to be cancelled rather than giving up on the goal she makes an alternative arrangement. In her goal book Shivani reflects: *“I didn't do this because she was busy and outside but I read book with my other friend.”*

What these examples demonstrate is that when learners are put in a position where they have to make decisions about their own learning, they rise to the challenge. Both Babak and Shivani display qualities such as flexibility, adaptability and creativity - all apparently brought about and fostered by autonomy. Having opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning, empowered these learners and allowed them to respond imaginatively and seek solutions when faced with setbacks.

That autonomy should drive creativity and innovation is not a new idea, either. Nor is language education the only sector with a vested interest in fostering it. The world of business has started to take notice, too. Most notably, the bosses and founders of companies described as ‘creative industries’. They realised that the management and leadership styles of yesteryear with their rigid hierarchies, KPIs and various incentives simply do not work when it comes to boosting creativity. Quite the opposite - they undermine it. Many of these companies have addressed it by giving their employees more freedom. For example, at Google staff can use 20% of their time to work on any project

they like, choose who to work with and how to go about completing it (Pink, 2010). That's a day a week spent on pursuing their own interests, hunches, following curiosity or taking the initiative to solve problems. Naturally, this is all within the parameters of their roles but still this is not an insignificant time investment for a company. An investment they would not be making if they did not believe in its effectiveness. And effective it is. Well known products such as Gmail, Google Translate and Google News have all been birthed during this period of pure autonomy (ibid). Another famous company to offer a similar programme to their employees is 3M - the company that gave us the ubiquitous 'post it' notes. In fact, 3M whose president and chairman's credo was 'hire good people and leave them alone', were the pioneers of this approach (ibid). At 15 % they may not be as generous as Google but it certainly raised a few eyebrows when it was first offered over 50 years ago (Pink, 2010).

In her article, titled 'How to kill creativity', the author and Harvard Business School professor, Teresa Amabile, explains: '*Autonomy around process fosters creativity because giving people freedom in how they approach their work heightens their intrinsic motivation and sense of ownership. Freedom about process also allows people to approach problems in ways that make the most of their expertise and their creative-thinking skills. The task may end up being a stretch for them, but they can use their strengths to meet the challenge.'* (Amabile, 1998).

Responding to setbacks is not the only way in which this autonomy enabled creativity manifests itself. Creativity is also evident in the examples below where learners combined their social goals with other skills and activities they enjoy or would like to develop. For some learners this included practising and consolidating new vocabulary:

> *"I will learn some new words and try talking in English with my friends."*
>
> *"speaking with friends and learning the new words."*

Others tried to identify sources of information to use in conversations with friends or family members:

“watching TED talks and speaking with friends”

“I will watch BBC two times a week with my husband”

“watching bbc channel and speaking with my daughter”

“I will read books and chat with my friends”

Some learners looked for sources of natural linguistic input around them:

“listening to the people what they are speak”

“I will listen properly to people how they are talking and making sentences”

And for one learner doing homework which a child presented an irresistible opportunity to practise English:

“going to speak more with my daughter about her homework to improve speaking”

In all of these examples learners tap into existing activities. Things they already do, enjoy doing and / or want to do more of. They start thinking about their environments in terms of opportunities to practise English often to the benefit of all those involved. After all, no one would argue that meaningful interactions between friends or family members cannot enhance the relationships between them.

Kulvinder

Kulvinder’s (not her real name) attitude when she joined the class was: ‘why not give it a go, might as well’. Her daughter was a pupil at the school and the class start time conveniently coincided with the drop off time, so why not. However, although she may not have admitted it at the time (to others or even to herself) she had other important reasons to join. Before coming to the UK Kulvinder was a qualified cardiac nurse with 4 years’ experience of working in an operating theatre. Nursing was her passion. Even as she

travelled to the UK to marry her husband and start her new life here, Kulvinder dreamed of upskilling and continuing her career. And she made a good start, too. She enrolled on a BSc Nursing degree at a London University which she completed successfully a couple of years later. She wanted to follow it up with a Level 7 qualification in Healthcare Management, unfortunately, the course was abruptly cancelled but her desire to gain this extra qualification continued.

Hard work was instilled in Kulvinder from a very young age by her father - 'If you study hard then you will get good jobs and stand on your feet so you can help yourself in the future', he would say. Kulvinder confesses that her father wasn't well educated but he recognised the value of education for his children. He wanted them to be successful in their lives and was willing to finance their studies. As a result, Kulvinder went to good schools in India where the medium of instruction was largely English. This meant that her English language skills were very good when she arrived in the UK and explains how she was able to complete her degree here.

However, her plans changed diametrically when her daughter was born. Although the arrival of her daughter was a happy event in Kulvinder's life, it also meant that she had to make several important decisions with regards to her life and career. Together with her husband, Kulvinder decided that she would be the best person to look after her daughter which necessitated taking a break from studying and work. It also meant losing access to daily English practice. At the time when she became pregnant, Kulvinder was working at a nursing home in west London. Her work gave her an opportunity to interact with the residents and staff which she not only immensely enjoyed but also, as she soon found out, was her only access to meaningful English practice. Leaving work meant losing access to this important part of her life:

> *"Quitting my job impacted me a lot because I was not speaking with anyone. I was at home alone with my daughter. When I spoke to my friends or family, they used to speak my language only."*

When her daughter was old enough to start school Kulvinder was able to revisit her goals. However, the years spent at home with little contact with English knocked her confidence.

She had already held a belief that despite being exposed to English from a young age, her knowledge of grammar and speaking skills were not adequate. Her low self-esteem was further affected when after taking an IELTS test she did not get the score she had hoped for, only reaffirming her low self-belief. Thankfully, the hard-working attitude instilled in her by her father prevailed and when she saw the flyer for English classes at her daughter's school she decided to join. As mentioned earlier, Kulvinder was initially rather dismissive about her reasons to join the course, possibly to mask her low confidence or to manage expectations, or both. *"I thought, I'm doing nothing, why not join this course"* she told me. Yet, the real reasons for joining the course did not stay hidden very long. They emerged when she was given the chance to reflect upon her goals and motivations. One of those goals was to improve her knowledge of grammar as well as her reading and listening skills. As she later explained she needed to improve her language skills in order to get a sufficiently high IELTS score to be able to resume her healthcare studies. But this was not her only goal. Now a parent, Kulvinder's priorities have started to shift. And although, her career goals remain important to her, nowadays her daughter takes the centre stage. In her goal book Kulvinder wrote: *[I want to] improve my vocabulary so I can help my daughter in her studies.* Like her father before, Kulvinder recognises the value of education and takes her daughter's education very seriously. And like her father, she is ready to invest in it; perhaps not financially but certainly with time and attention.

By her own admission, Kulvinder is an introverted person and finds making new friends difficult. This is not to say that she will not oblige if someone approaches her for help, including out of class interaction. Yet, one would struggle trying to find social goals in Kulvinder's goal book. Where she may lack in social goals, she more than makes up for them by involving her daughter in learning. For example, when choosing books at the library, Kulvinder makes sure that the books she picks can be enjoyed by both of them. She would often read the books on her own first to make sure she understands the content. This may involve looking up unfamiliar words or pronunciation. She would then read the same book with her daughter. On other occasions, Kulvinder would also go over the tests she did in the class with her daughter as well. She viewed this as an opportunity to pass that knowledge onto her daughter and to consolidate her own knowledge: *"It was practice for me two times!"* she enthused.

At the end of her goal book, Kulvinder concluded: "*I talked with my daughter more times in English than before, I read books with her and found the difficult words, written them down and found meanings of those words."*

It seems that, for Kulvinder at least, this pursuit of better language skills, had an unintended, but welcome, side-effect. By setting goals that involved her daughter, Kulvinder not only could practise her language skills, but also spend more time with her. In Kulvinder's case, being able to set her own goals, to decide for herself the 'what' and the 'how', created opportunities for meaningful language practice that was unique to her circumstances. And although these activities may have had a language focus for Kulvinder, they also brought a mother and a daughter closer together by allowing them to spend quality time in each other's company.

What strikes me the most about these goals is how personal they are. They are meaningful to the people writing them. They are organic and grow out of their own motivations. It is hard to imagine a teacher 'prescribing' such goals to learners even if they were negotiated.

However, we cannot assume that autonomous behaviour will emerge spontaneously. Not all learners will have the skills or confidence to be able to identify learning opportunities around them let alone take advantage of them. Autonomy has to be nurtured. Teachers have to create an environment which will enable and empower learners to make learning decisions for themselves.

In a conference paper titled 'Autonomous learning: A teacher-less learning!' researchers Nima Shakouri Masouleh and Razieh Bahraminezhad Jooneghani conclude that, '*being autonomous, in initial state, involves being scaffolded by teachers in order to enhance the process of learning. Without this, it would be difficult to implement independent learning in a coherent way and to attract institutional commitment.' (Masouleh & Jooneghani, 2012: 841)*

The design of this intervention supported autonomy development in learners by giving them the space to conceptualize their goals. The goals above, at the stage when they were written, were mere wishes - statements of intention. However, they became the driving force for action and helped learners to shape their learning via the support goals (weekly goals). Conceptualizing course goals guided learners allowing them to determine what actions they had to complete each week in order to achieve them. Perhaps, this is

what Alan McLean – the author of 'The Motivated School' (2003) – meant when he said that setting a goal demonstrates an intention to achieve and triggers learning.

Gauging from the responses to the questionnaires one might conclude that setting goals does indeed lead to an increased sense of agency and autonomy. However, most questionnaires, mine included, have their limitations. I realised it when in my interview with Babak and Kulvinder, they said something that made me question the extent to which learners indeed self-regulated their own learning behaviour. Babak said: *At the beginning I felt guilty if I didn't complete my goals but later I enjoyed doing them.* The sentiment was shared by Kulvinder: *Before I felt that it was a burden but then I realised that they were helping us.* When probed, they both admitted that the feeling of guilt stemmed from not wanting to disappoint the teacher. It appears that although learners had full autonomy over their goals and their execution, the motivation to complete them was (at least in these cases) regulated externally. This seems consistent with Self Determination Theory - the motivation model proposed by Deci and Ryan. This was discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis but it is worth briefly reminding the reader its main tenets here. Essentially, Deci and Ryan proposed that our behaviour can vary in the degree it is externally controlled and self-determined and suggested four forms of regulation built around the concept of internalization which included external, introjected, identified and integrated regulation (Deci & Ryan 2000). They argued that one can 'slide along' this continuum as one internalises their behaviour.

Because participation in the course was voluntary and there were no actual repercussions for not completing the goals (or prizes for completing them for that matter), we can safely rule out the external regulation where our behaviour is driven by a 'stick and carrot' approach. However, as Deci and Ryan (2000) point out, a feeling of guilt can be experienced at the 'introjected' stage. They argue that at this stage we have accepted the rules as norms. We follow the task and feel guilty if we do not. It is likely that this is what happened in this example. Whilst there were no explicitly set rules as to the completion of the goal books, the consistency with which the activity of setting and reviewing goals occurred may initially have been interpreted as non-optional - something that 'had to' be done. Moreover, the fact that most learners participated in the goal setting activity, may have had a normalising effect. It became something that was done in the class - a part of its culture. *'Each class has its own rules and the rule of your class was to complete the goals'* said Babak.

Note however, that in both examples this guilt driven behaviour had changed. It evolved into a new kind of motivation. As the time passed both learners stopped perceiving this activity as something that had to be done but rather as something they were inclined to do. Babak said that later he enjoyed completing his goals whilst Kulvinder conceded that they were helpful. Both learners 'slid' along Deci and Ryan's continuum. Admittedly, without further interviews it is difficult to confirm precisely where on the continuum they ended up, however given the fact that at least in one example the goal setting activity was found useful, one can speculate that they moved up a step - to identified regulation. According to Deci and Ryan identified regulation is a process through which we recognize and accept the underlying value of behaviour and see its usefulness; the behaviour becomes more autonomous although it is still instrumental, e.g. homework is done because we see it as valuable and we exercise for our own health and wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Arguably, the sense of enjoyment expressed by Babak may also be an expression of satisfaction from completing an activity that is seen as useful.

This finding is interesting and quite encouraging at the same time (if not entirely unexpected). It is interesting because despite my effort to encourage autonomous and self-regulated behaviour, some students still relied on perceived teacher and (possibly) peer pressure to complete their goals every week. However, it is also encouraging because, as the above examples demonstrate, it seems that, given sufficient consistency, it is possible for learners to internalise this behaviour. In Chapter two I quoted Deci and Ryan which I feel is particularly pertinent here, too. They argued that '*[t]o fully internalize a regulation, and thus to become autonomous with respect to it, people must inwardly grasp its meaning and worth.'* (2000: 64). In the end both Babak and Kulvinder became more autonomous having recognised the inherent value of setting goals by themselves and for themselves. Moreover, given that the surveys were completed at the end of the course, it is also possible that what the learners reported when they were probed about autonomy was their perception of it following this change.

This is important because autonomy and motivation are interlinked. The more perceived autonomy you have over an activity the more motivated you are to complete it. And the more motivated you are the more likely you are to take charge of your own learning. Having said that, there has been a chicken and egg debate with regards to which begets which. Some scholars maintain that motivation precedes autonomy (e.g. Pintrich, 1999; Vandergrift, 2005, in Cevallos, et al 2017). They claim that only those who have an

interest or motivation (extrinsic or intrinsic) to learn a second language can have the necessary discipline and attitude required for the ongoing process of language learning (Cevallos, et al 2017). Others, such as Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) and, as we have seen, Deci and Ryan (2000), argue that autonomy (i.e. the freedom to make decisions) facilitates motivation - it spurs us into action.

This is a tricky question, I agree. Arguably, both sides of the argument could be right. The participants in this study were already motivated when they signed up for the course and their course goals are a testament to that (a point for the motivation first camp). However, the challenge is to keep the learners motivated when they start the course and it is this stage where the autonomy plays an important role (and it's a draw!). In chapter two we looked at a motivation model proposed by Dornyei and Otto (1998) which outlines three motivational phases: pre-actional, actional and post-actional (evaluation). My students' initial motivation to join the course along with setting goals or forming intentions falls under the pre-actional phase whereas autonomy comes under the 'actional' phase as part of the teacher's motivational influence[11]. Note that Dornyei and Otto, acknowledge the role of the teacher in this process, or more specifically, her 'motivational influence'. Is it autonomy supporting or controlling? Objectively speaking, both can affect learner behaviour but only autonomy supporting strategies have the potential not only to motivate but also to foster qualities such as self-reliance, initiative taking, solution focus, etc. that we see in successful language learners.

However, as Dornyei and Ushioda (2013) point out, perhaps we should not be thinking of motivation in terms of cause-and-effect binary states, before and after a task or an event because this is not how most people experience it in real life. Motivation is much more complex than that. They argue that it *'usually evolves gradually, through a complex mental process that involves initial planning and goal setting, intention formation, task*

[11] There are other important factors, e.g. the novelty of the learning materials or the quality of learning experience but here we focus mainly on the role of autonomy.

generation, action implementation, action control and outcome evaluation.' (Dornyei and Ushioda, 2013: 6)

They acknowledge that there are different sub-phases of the motivation process which may be associated with different motives and remind us that *'[i]gnoring 'time' can (and often does) result in a situation when two theories are equally valid and yet contradict – simply because they refer to different phases of the motivation process'* (Dornyei and Ushioda, 2013: 6).

Fostering autonomy is one of many strategies that teachers can use to facilitate motivation to study. This was an important aspect of this study and is what we turn to next.

"I have to do it today!" - Motivation to study

Question 2: To what extent can goal setting help to motivate ESOL learners to practise language skills in their own time through self-directed study?

As we saw in the previous chapter, the initial findings showed good evidence supporting the notion that goal setting can help to motivate ESOL learners to practise language skills in their own time through self-directed study (research question two)**.** We looked at answers to two questions which probed this hypothesis. Answers to the first of them (Did you find that writing your own goals motivated you to study more?) provided the strongest support for the goals' potential to motivate learners to study with 10 out of 12 of them responding in the affirmative to this question (2 responses were unclear). However, the responses to the second question (Would you have been doing these things if you hadn't been asked to write your goals?) and their subsequent interpretation is a little more problematic. They revealed that 4 participants answered 'no' thus confirming that any new language practice activities were the result of setting goals and 3 said 'yes' thus arguing that the contrary was the case, another 3 participants said Yes, but their longer responses indicated that they, in fact, meant NO, i.e. they indicated that they practised English more as a result of goal setting (e.g. *YES, I use more English outside of the class because it is very important new English [sic])*. One person did not understand the question and one was not sure.

Aside from the fact that goal setting, as done here, promotes autonomy which feeds into motivation, goals themselves have a motivating function. In chapter two we looked at the reasons why goals work. One such reason, put forward by Locke and Latham (2002), is that goals direct attention and effort. They argued that setting a goal promotes behaviours that minimize distractions and facilitate task completion. The analysis of the participants' responses provides evidence that supports this view. Consider the following responses from two of my learners:

> *"[Setting goals] makes me to think about my priority goals and give me direction to know every time I want to start studying. I know what I have to do."*
>
> *"When I'm scheduled the things already for the whole week it went well for me."*

These examples demonstrate that scheduling activities and setting them as goals helped these learners to complete them. As predicted by Locke and Latham (2002), they gave them a sense of direction and focus. Goals provided a stimulus that worked as a reminder for them. It appears that creating the space for learners to think about or to conceptualize their goals initiated a course of action that on a conscious or subconscious level they felt they needed to complete. This effect was further amplified by a sense of ownership, e.g.:

> *"I used to practise everyday more than 1 hour. Writing goal such as 'practise grammar' motivated me to study more. I always completed my goals when I wrote them. Because it is my goal."*

It seems that the sense of ownership which accompanies the writing of own goals may in some cases induce a degree of cognitive dissonance which manifests itself as a feeling of guilt or disappointment with oneself when the goal is not completed. In our interview, Babak admitted that the sense of guilt was even worse when he failed to complete his goals precisely because he set them himself. However, notice that this is not the same kind of guilt as the guilt I described earlier, where the negative feeling was caused by something outside of ourselves, i.e. disappointing the teacher. Whereas in this case it comes from within - disappointing oneself. This too is consistent with Deci and Ryan's

Self Determination Theory. It shows that as learners internalize the behaviour, it becomes more consistent with their identity. It is the mismatch between the way they start to perceive themselves and their actions that causes the feeling of guilt.

When I raised it with Babak, he said:

> *"Sometimes I put a goal for myself that was a bit hard for me to do, so my brain just says to me 'okay just do it later, it's morning, do it later!' but at the end of the day when I knew that this is the class day, I have to do it today! And if I didn't do it I would feel guilty. So I put pressure on myself to do that."*

Initially, Babak admitted that the guilt was caused by not following the rules of the class, i.e. not doing the homework, however, when I pointed out that in the case of goal setting it was he himself who set the homework, he conceded that this made it even worse: "*We set the homework for ourselves and we didn't do the homework!"*

There is a very interesting interplay here between procrastination, the feeling of guilt it induces and goals. We know from chapter two that procrastination is a coping mechanism - a way to avoid emotionally unpleasant tasks (e.g. Steel, 2007) which allows us to distract ourselves from these emotions by doing something else instead; something that brings a temporary mood boost (Locke, 2016). This appears to be the case here too. Consider the following extract from my interview with Babak:

> *"Sometimes I studied outside the class things that weren't my goals but I didn't work on the hardest parts because they needed a bit more energy, they needed a bit more work and I just ignore it 'okay, let's do this later' ".*

It is apparent from this example that Babak procrastinates. He knows that there are things he should be working on; however, he distracts himself from the harder tasks (presumably the goals) by focusing on things that he considers easier. Things that require less energy and bring on the temporary mood boost. However, from the previous extract we also know that eventually the deadline forces him to complete his goals. In the end, the guilt stirring cognitive dissonance coupled with an energizing power of a deadline trump procrastination.

This energizing function of goals along with their effort expenditure regulating role is consistent with Locke and Latham's goal setting theory (2002). The reader may also remember that Piers Steel (and colleagues) discussed the goals capacity to energize (2018) in the context of procrastination (or as he elegantly called it 'self-regulation failure'). Steel et. al. argued that we are more likely to procrastinate when the tasks we need to complete are temporally distant and the goals motivating power often comes to its own as the deadline nears (2018). This is exactly what we can see in the extract above where Babak concedes that he does indeed procrastinate and only completes his goals when he cannot put them off any further: "(...) *my brain just says to me 'okay just do it later, it's morning, do it later!' but at the end of the day when I knew that this is the class day, I have to do it today!"*

Many of us can relate to Babak (I certainly can!). But we are all different. Our backgrounds, commitments, responsibilities, personalities, motivations, all differ from person to person. Kulvinder is a case in point. When I posed the same question to her, she said that although it did occasionally happen that she left things until the last minute, she was generally too busy to have the time to procrastinate:

> *"Sometimes I left it till the last minute. My problem is that sometimes I get really tired because I have to get up at five o'clock every day and work all day and at night I go to bed at 11 o'clock so I have very little time to sleep. It's only in that sense, when I'm very tired I will leave it till the end but otherwise I try to follow my goals schedule and sometimes I finish my goals before the set time."*

Needless to say, Kulvinder is a very busy person. And yet, despite her busy schedule, she manages to complete her goals. Neither is she unique in this respect. Like Kulvinder, most of the participants in this cohort are busy mothers, spouses, carers, etc but they do somehow manage to find some time for themselves to complete their goals. So how do they do it? And why?

We looked at some of the strategies learners used in our discussion on autonomy and saw learners taking advantage of linguistic affordances, e.g. using English whilst socializing with friends and neighbours, organizing children's homework or activities such as reading time, watching TV in English, etc, e.g.:

“I speaked with my child in English for 10 mins. I studied more and more - storybooks, newspaper, saw youtube.”

It seems that the only way a busy adult learner can reconcile engaging in a new activity with her busy life is by ‘piggybacking’ on activities she does already. Kulvinder also utilised her travelling time (walking to/from class, travelling to/from work, school runs) listening to podcasts about grammar - an activity she had become very fond of: ‘*I love to do that. Because that this is my need as well and it’s going to help me.’* This simple acknowledgement also gives us a glimpse into the reasons why adult learners engage in these additional activities despite their busy schedules. It is the recognition that learning and practising English is useful and personally important to them. But there is also something inherently rewarding about achieving goals that we have set for ourselves.

As we saw, despite her very busy schedule, Kulvinder managed to complete all her goals every week. But she also reflected that she felt happy after completing her goals weekly. The sense of satisfaction she felt may have had a reinforcing effect on the learning behaviour and helped to establish a form of positive feedback loop where the satisfaction from successfully completing a task was rewarding enough for her to maintain the activity over an extended period of time:

“I was happy," she said laughing, adding promptly, *"that’s why I did it!”*

This too is consistent with Locke and Latham’s goal setting theory in which they posit that goals encourage persistence until the task is accomplished (2002) and Dornyei and Otto’s assertion that achievable goals allow learners to experience success which may have a powerful motivating function as they mark progress and provide immediate incentive and feedback (1998).

But for some learners it was also the connection between the short term and long-term goals that helped them to persist. It was the promise of the long-term goals and dreams that kept them going as is illustrated by the comment below:

“I studied more because setting my goals kept me in touch with my studies. I was completing my goals to fulfil my dreams.”

The discussion so far has supported the notion that planning your own learning and setting own goals can be effective in motivating ESOL learners to practise language skills in their own time. We have seen learners trying to fit learning into their already busy lives often tapping into existing activities such as doing homework with their children or travelling to and from school, etc. However, I also wanted to determine whether or not this was a new activity which resulted from setting goals. After all, it would not be unreasonable to assume that if you join a language course with the intention to learn / improve your skills in this language, you will also make the effort to practise it whenever you can. This, however, could be a mistaken assumption. As we have seen, the majority of the learners in this cohort are busy adults with little time to spare. This is why I decided to probe it in the survey. As I reported earlier, the answers were largely inconclusive. This could have been partly due to the complex syntax used in the question itself which I tried to address by providing additional, clarifying questions. Although, this was disappointing at first, a closer analysis revealed that the responses were largely in line with my earlier conclusion that setting goals does lead to more language practice outside of the classroom. For example:

> *"Goals motivated me to study and to use English more. I didn't use to do these things before or not so regularly."*
>
> *"I use English more outside of the class. It is very important new English."*
>
> *"I use my goals at home when I have to time I use more than in my class."*
>
> *"I think setting goals made me more confident to learn and to speak."*

Some learners also confirmed that they introduced new activities into their routines, e.g.:

> *"No [I wouldn't have been doing these things if I hadn't written them as goals], I was far away from focusing on listening BBC and reading English. I was just speaking with my friends."*

"I mentioned before I was not in touch with English. I was using it but only cause of my daughter's homework. But as teacher said to write down the goals it became my aim to improve my overall English as well."

However, it is only fair to say that not everyone felt that setting goals helped them to study more. Some learners did indeed join with the intention to study in and out of the classroom, e.g.:

"I study a lot and setting goals didn't motivate me to study more because I didn't write somethings one my words I'm weak in spelling."

But even in situations when the learner already studies or intends to study in her own time, setting goals may still be beneficial. Babak is a case in point. Given his educational background, Babak was already used to studying hard at home and his single status meant that he did not have the same commitments as many of the other learners in the group. And yet when he joined the class (four weeks later than other students) and learned about goal setting, something in his head clicked. Before joining the course, Babak thought of English in very broad and general terms, something that he knew he had to learn but was not sure where to start. Needless to say, goals such as mastering a new language can be distant and overwhelming. It is therefore important to break them down into smaller, more achievable and manageable goals. This is exactly what Babak realized when he started using the goal book.

Here is Babak describing the process in a typical for him colourful fashion:

"Learning English is not a real goal. It's something like putting an elephant inside the room. You have to cut it down. Bit by bit. And like that you put your goals inside learning English. Learning English is not a goal. The first thing I got from this goal book is goals inside goals. I was shocked and then I thought 'what can be my goals'. At first my goals were very general, e.g. my first goal was to speak English accurately and not specific goal like 'this tense, that tense'. It was a big shock and a really good start for me to think differently about learning a language. Weekly goals was like 'now you have to do something'.

The goalbook started a new way for me which I continued. I developed flashcards and I continued using this method even after the class. I realised that I need more words."

(By the way, we often address 'the elephant in the room' but no one has ever asked how it got there. Well, now you know!)

To cooperate, or to compete. That is the question!

The motivation to study also came from another, somewhat unexpected source. When setting up the study, I placed an emphasis on creating opportunities for cooperation. For example, learners could swap tips, compare and exchange learning sources, work together towards shared goals, discuss progress, etc. What I had not anticipated was that this environment was also conducive to promoting competitive behaviour. When I asked Babak whether he felt that sharing goals with other students was beneficial for him in that it allowed him to pick up useful ideas from others, he admitted that although this was true, he also found that hearing others share their achievements stimulated him to do better. Here is Babak responding to the question 'Did you find that discussing and sharing goals in the class allowed you to learn from other students?' (and yes, the elephant is making an appearance again!)

"Not just learning from others. Sometimes I felt: Wow, I'm so jealous about this! She learnt this word and this word! It was like a motivation for me.

I have to be better than them! And learn new words. Actually, I'm dead competitive!

It was both [cooperation/ competitiveness] at the same time because I like the way the other people are getting on and they're all moving as well and there is a team in which we're all moving but inside this team in which we're moving I like to see that I'm better than the others. We are there to learn English more and all of the information is in the hands of all of the people. I can take different slices from different people and gather together for myself. We share the elephant. This made me smarter. Each time when I saw the others' goals and I said to myself 'okay

that's better than mine' and I use that and I say 'okay there's something better than this' and it gets me smarter and smarter. So I found my way to get to my goals."

It is evident from this description that comparing progress with other students induced a feeling of envy in Babak which also motivated him to study harder. It has been argued that competitive learning environments are sometimes contrasted disparagingly with collaborative ones (Lai, 2011). Generally, research shows that competitiveness whilst a powerful motivator, may undermine intrinsic motivation and the joy of learning (Deci, et.al., 1981). It can induce performance goals (Lam, et al, 2004) which as we saw in Chapter 2 may affect one's sense of agency and promote a helpless response when faced with a setback (Dweck and Leggett, 1988). It may also adversely affect one's performance on memory tasks (DiMenichi & Tricomi, 2015). However, I doubt that this should be the case in Babak's example. As I already stated, my intention was to establish a cooperative not competitive learning environment. An environment in which learners could feed off each other's ideas, swap tips and encourage one another rather than one where success is defined as doing better than others.

But if it is not the classroom environment that instigated this feeling of competitiveness, then what? And is it really detrimental? Admittedly, talking about achievements and comparing progress with other peers may inadvertently induce a competitive feeling in some students especially when they feel their progress is slower than others'. Not that I think that this is necessarily always a bad thing. After all, competitive zeal has been shown to have positive effects in the many settings in which deep processing is not required (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2000 in Grant and Dweck, 2003) and to improve attention in a physical effort task (DiMenichi & Tricomi, 2015). But I feel in Babak's case this was more to do with his personality than the classroom environment. By his own admission, Babak is very competitive and, if anything, students' reports of progress became a benchmark against which to measure his own relative effort and progress. The environment that was created to support students' goals (their setting and completion), for Babak at least, also became conducive to learning in other ways. It allowed him to engage in a process that was both reflective and formative. Listening to others talking about their achievements was an opportunity for him to identify gaps in his own knowledge and motivated him to address those gaps. If this sounds somewhat egocentric, it's probably because it is. Babak used other students' ideas to improve his own language skills. Although I would

argue that, far from being something that should be frowned upon, this makes him an effective language learner. After all, this is what this exercise was about - to share and to learn from one another. Despite joining the class later than other students, Babak quickly recognised the value of this exercise which is evident when he says: "*We are there to learn English more and all of the information is in the hands of all of the people. I can take different slices from different people and gather together for myself. We share the elephant."*

Kulvinder, too, admitted that she was competitive although in her case this competitiveness was of a different nature. Rather than comparing her progress against that of other students, she used scores on tests as her yardstick, e.g.:

> *"I'm always competitive. I want to see myself that I have to give proper effort. I have to score good marks. My competitiveness is just with myself only. That I can do better the next time."*

It has been suggested (Ryckman et al. 1996 in Kobal Grum & Grum 2015) that there are two types of competitive behaviour: hypercompetitive attitude and personal development competitive attitude. Hypercompetitive attitude is almost Machiavellian in nature; it can be characterised by the desire to achieve one's goals no matter the cost, caring only for one's self, hedonism, power, egocentrism, superiority, etc. Personal development competitive attitude, on the other hand, is not so much concerned with winning as it is with personal growth resulting from competitive situations (as perceived by the learner). A person with this orientation is focused on discovering herself and her potential. She may also have a critical relationship towards her own development. Her goals are often set with the intention of progress, thus performing in the best possible way (Ryckman et al. 1996 in Kobal Grum & Grum 2015).

I would argue that despite the differences in their competitive dispositions, both Babak and Kulvider fall into the latter category. Ultimately, they are both driven by the desire to improve their language skills; to be the best they can. Moreover, the goal setting methodology seems to be congruent with personal development competitive attitude. It creates an environment in which learners like Babak and Kulvinder seem to thrive. Setting

and reviewing goals requires learners to be critical and reflective. For Babak and Kulvinder that meant that they could review their progress against criteria they deemed relevant and their competitive nature pushed them to work harder.

"I started talking to people" - Using English outside the classroom

Question 3: To what extent can setting own goals increase the time English is used outside of the class?

The third question investigated the extent to which setting goals led to learners spending more time using English outside of the classroom.

As we saw in the previous chapter, when surveyed learners in this cohort almost unanimously confirmed that setting goals allowed them to consider their environment to identify opportunities to practise English (11 out of 12 respondents confirmed that this was the case) and motivated them to use it more (12 out of 12 learners agreed). However, a closer analysis of the longer responses as well as of their goals revealed a more nuanced picture.

Generally, learners' longer responses point to an increase in the social aspect of language use which is hardly surprising given what we said about social goals earlier. Learners referred to more consistency in their interactions with friends, more focus on accuracy and to paying greater attention to the linguistic input around them, e.g.:

> *"I used it more when I wrote my goals e.g. I sometimes talked to my friend in English but it wasn't consistent. When I wrote my goal I made sure I did it."*
>
> *"I used more English than before because I started speaking more English with my friends and I started listening to other people more than usual."*
>
> *"Now I text my friends and we use correct tenses and talk to them more often in English."*

Familiar are also the comments they made about identifying opportunities to practise English in their most immediate environments, namely at home with their children:

> *"I studied English everyday 1 hour. Just reading more and more and spoke with my child."*
>
> *"Yes, I used English more in the weeks. Because I like to talk with my daughter at home. So I improved my speaking skills. And to be honest I have learned some new things from her as well."*

Some responses indicated growing confidence and independence when applying English in dealing with day to day situations, e.g.:

> *"When I go for shopping I use English and go to the GP use English. When I answer the phone I use English."*

Generally, the connection between setting goals and the activities learners engaged in were largely implied. However, some learners were also likely to attribute changes in language use and study pattern directly to setting goals. This is certainly the case in the first example above where the learner states outright that the activities she engaged in were a direct result of setting goals. Other examples include:

> *"I use more English when I use goals that you want to use to write the goals."*
>
> *"I used English more. I spend half an hour per day. The goals set and follow the ways."*
>
> *"I spend 15 minutes every day. I'm using goal."*

“Actually because of goal book I was thinking about the ways to have more English sections and I use more like stories and ext [exercises?]”

The connections between setting goals and the use of English outside of the class were also explored by the next survey question, i.e.: Did [goal setting] make you think about how and when to use English? Despite answering ‘yes’ most students seem to have misunderstood it and instead provided more examples of how they used English outside of the class or how their English had improved, e.g.:

“Yes it made me when I speak in English with friends neighbours. Now I can.”

“Yes I talk to my child, neighbour, friends in English. I watch youtube.”

“Yes, it made me learn more English by completing my goals from goal book.”

“Yes, these opportunities are very useful. Now I am good in English.. It helped me. I talk English in correct sentence.”

“Yes, I used when I have time I’m using every Monday and Friday and I watch TV English programme.”

Although somewhat disappointing, these responses are not necessarily evidence against the argument that learners engaged in thinking and planning their use of English outside of the classroom. In fact, the analysis so far points to the contrary. After all, to set a goal one has to think about what the goal is and what achieving it entails. Some of the goals and responses we have looked at so far confirm this. Take the following social goals I described earlier for example:

“I am going to my friend home I will speak in English;”

“I will speak to my neighbour every day;”

Both these goals express an intention to engage in an activity whereby English is used and practised outside of the classroom. Both goals required the learners to consider their environment in order to identify suitable opportunities for language use. This is largely confirmed by the responses of the learners who did understand the question, e.g.:

> *"I never used to plan my learning. Thinking about my goals made me plan and think about how to practise English. Because of that my English improved."*
>
> *"It made me think about the ways of learning and how to use them. I joined communities and churches and started talking to people and learn many different things from them."*
>
> *"Yes I did think how to use English each day. I was speaking to my daughter on daily basis and wherever she was using wrong tenses I was correcting her because of my English classes. And to maintain my level I listen to TED talks on youtube."*

In theory, the analysis so far provides sufficient evidence that when setting goals learners try to identify opportunities for language practice. One could, therefore, justifiably argue that if the evidence is there already why even ask the question. In hindsight, they would have a point but as William Blake put it 'hindsight is a wonderful thing, but foresight is better.'

This brings us to my fourth and last research question: Has it all been worth it? (well that wasn't the actual question but words to the effect).

When things matter - Achieving goals

Question 4: To what extent can goal setting help ESOL learners improve their language skills as specified in their course goals?

Before launching into the analysis of the responses, it is important to keep in mind the context of this study. Given its interpretivist nature, one way to answer this question is with a proviso that the answer will inevitably be based on the participants' subjective assessment of their progress and my subjective interpretation of their comments. I will attempt to inject a dose of objectivity by dipping into departmental records to look at the students' pre-test and post-test scores (we do ask learners in some classes to complete a grammar/vocabulary test at the start of the class which is then repeated at the end). However, this numerical data will only be used to confirm or refute the claims made by the students themselves and my own conclusions. It is generally expected that students make progress in learning when they attend classes. That's the whole point. Therefore, the record of learner progress reported here cannot be categorically confirmed to be an outcome of goal setting alone but rather (and more likely) a combination of factors in which setting goals was an important contributing 'ingredient'. Neither do those scores reflect or capture the breadth and wealth of interactions learners would have had as a result of goal setting which is why their comments, subjective though they may be, are so important.

As stated above, the fourth and final research question dealt with the perceived impact of goal setting on the participants' language skills particularly in areas defined by the participants themselves (set as course goals). The initial analysis provided at the end of the previous chapter showed that all participants felt positive about their progress in English and most felt that they had achieved their course goals. Given the discussion so far, this should come as little surprise. After all, we have already seen that learners tend to spend more time studying and using English when they consider opportunities around them and set them as goals to achieve. However, despite gaining a much better understanding of the interplay between goal setting and language learning, there is still more we can learn about the way learners go about achieving their long-term goals.

Take, for example, their weekly goals. Weekly goals were an essential part of the design of this study. I was hoping that setting and reviewing goals on a weekly basis would help learners develop a routine of learning which in turn would make it easier for them to make decisions about what to study and when. The figures reported in the last chapter suggest that most learners tried to complete their weekly goals although some of them struggled to do it every week. We saw that 6 participants confirmed that they completed their goals on a weekly basis, 4 managed to do it almost every week (2 answers were unclear).

Those who did manage to complete their goals every week recognised and valued the usefulness of this activity, e.g.:

> *"Yes, I manage each week. It's really help me. First time I came to the course I don't speak English well but now I'm improve."*
>
> *"Yes I achieve my goals each week. It's helped me. It's useful for us."*
>
> *"Yes, I managed to achieve my goals each week because it is very helpful to me. Reading writing, grammar speaking to help me."*
>
> *"Yes, it helped me to remember that I should prepare for tomorrow."*

It seems that one of the reasons why they continued to engage in goal setting was because it was inherently rewarding - it was making a difference to their language skills. This is analogous to the feeling of satisfaction Kulvider experienced after completing her goals which kept her going despite her very busy life. I described this earlier in the chapter where I argued that the positive feeling we experience after completing a goal reinforces the activity itself creating a positive feedback loop. When setting up this study I was also hoping that the rewarding nature of achieving goals along with careful scheduling would help learners develop a studying habit or at least a learning routine. However, only a few were able to establish any form consistent study pattern, e.g.:

> *"Yes, I did have a routine of study. I accomplished my goals every week."*
>
> *"Yes, I have a routine of studying. For example I am talking with my friends in English everyday."*
>
> *"Nearly I tried to do work at the same time and same day which is mentioned in the goal book."*

Unsurprisingly, given what we know about this cohort, most of learners found it very difficult. Even when they thought they had a routine going, in the end their family and parental responsibilities would catch up with them:

“Yes, I have a routine of studying. Everyday I studied 6pm - 7pm. Sometimes I failed because I have a child but I tried hard.”

“No, some time I do study same time and sometime it was different time because I have two kid at home. That’s why.”

“Both at the morning and night. It’s routine but during the day it’s completely dependent on situation.”

Still, some tried to at least keep to the same day they put in their diaries even if they could not establish consistency around the times:

“No it wasn’t the same every week. It was different. But I stuck to the days I put in the book.”

Finally, there were those who did not even try to pretend that establishing a routine was feasible, instead they tried to complete their weekly goals whenever it was possible:

“I use my goal at different [times] every week Monday and Friday.”

“I study at different time. Sometimes I have work so I can’t routine the same time. After finished my work when I am free that time I study.”

“No I didn’t study the same time because sometimes I was busy on the same time when I get free I do it.”

When it came to completing their goals every week, learners also quoted unexpected events such as family/friends visits and job interviews as intervening factors, e.g.:

“Yes, sometimes I I got busy or my guests would come unexpectedly. In my culture guests can visit at any time.”

“I tried but the important things [I had] to do stop[ped] that, for example for my interview I stop it for 1 week.”

Having anticipated that this could be the case, I tried to alleviate it by discussing with students Mental Contrasting Implementation Intentions or WOOP (Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, Plan) - a strategy suggested by Gabrielle Oettingen and described in chapter two of this thesis. This was also given as a written set of instructions for students to refer to at home. However, there is little evidence that students actually used it. Therefore, I cannot comment on its effectiveness.

It is clear from these examples and the discussion thus far that adult learners’ responsibilities and commitments often take precedence over their learning goals. It is therefore little wonder that some learners despite their best intentions were unable to complete their goals every week. This is reflected in the number of goals learners set and completed. Overall 11 students submitted their goal books for analysis at the end of the course. The total number of possible goals they could set was 351 of which 314 goals (89%) were actually set. 243 (77%) of these goals were consequently completed (note that this figure may be skewed by the level of consistency and accuracy of learners’ recording and as such is not an exact science). 77% completion rate may not sound particularly impressive but it is not terrible, either. It also highlights the fact that although setting a goal does not guarantee its completion, it does make it more likely. And even though not all learners completed all their goals every week, writing goals enabled them to engage a range of cognitive processes such as planning and reflection. This, in turn, allowed them to identify and access opportunities for practising English in their own environments they may not have realized existed. Moreover, as we have seen, it also motivated them to study more and to use English more which as they admitted they would not have done if they had not set goals.

However, one question remains, did setting and reviewing goals help learners achieve their course goals and improve their language skills in the process?

My initial analysis showed that the majority of the learners (n=9) felt that they had achieved their course goals, 2 felt they had achieved them to some extent and one was unsure. Generally, learners tended not to elaborate on their answers beyond confirming that they had indeed achieved their goals, e.g.:

“Yes, I manage achieve my course goals.”

“Yes, I manage my course goals. It was good.”

For a more in-depth analysis of the extent to which learners felt they had achieved their goals we need to turn to their goal books. To remind the reader, to determine whether or not they had achieved their goals, learners were asked to look at the goals they set at the beginning of the course and reflect on the progress they had made against them. Contrary to the responses in the survey, an analysis of learner comments in their goal books revealed that 10 not 9 of them felt that they had achieved all or some of their goals. Broadly speaking learner course goals related to several key categories such as:

- communication skills (speaking and listening), e.g.: “*I want to know English and speak fluently in English.”*
- Reading, e.g.: “*I would like to read the book know the meaning and translate my language.”*
- Grammar and vocabulary, e.g.: “*I am not good in English so I can improve my knowledge of grammar.”*

Learners also referred to other important areas such as independence, confidence or a greater ability to support their children often combining them with other skills, e.g.:

“I want to be more fluent in speaking and improve confidence level.”

“Improve my English speaking because I want to depend on myself.”

“To improve my vocabulary so I can help my daughter in her studies.”

Generally, learners reported progress against their course goals in all these categories. When commenting on their progress, most learners confirmed the completion of the goal, e.g.:

“I spoke to neighbour and my English improve now.”

“I improve reading and grammar.”

“Yes, I believe my English grammar has improved cause I practised it on Englishpage.com.”

“Yes, I believe I am more confident than before in helping my daughter's homework.”

“Yes, I improved much, I feel much more confident.”

Some learners also acknowledged that despite improving against their targets, it is not the end of their learning journey, e.g.:

“In first week of course I didn't understand anything and I didn't write anything now I can read and write something in English. In week 12 I am very good and I want to more English lesson because I'm not good that much I want.”

This seems natural. The more our metacognitive skills improve, the more aware we become of the gaps in our knowledge. Earlier in the chapter we heard Babak refer to this phenomenon when he recognised that despite improving and making progress, learning English was an ongoing process for him.

But for some learners the significance of completing their goals went beyond the goals themselves.

Take Shivani who we briefly met earlier, for example. Shivani made the following commitment at the start of the course:

“I want to learn English and improve my English then I will speak to other people easily. I know it is not possible to achieve in 12 weeks. It's hard to learn English but I will try my best to improve my English.”

And try her best, she did. Shivani set and completed her goals every week. A closer look at her goal diary reveals that she started to make important positive changes in her life as a result of goal setting. A resident of a safe house for victims of modern-day slavery, Shivani was quiet and somewhat withdrawn but she was also determined to make the best out of the opportunity that was joining the English course. She started to make friends in the class and to involve them in her goals, e.g. "*I will speak to my friend Leila. I will practise with her at lunch time."* She also started to interact with other residents at the hostel something she did not do previously: *"I am trying more to talk in English where I'm staying here."* Shivani made sure that she practised other aspects of the English language as well, e.g. *"going to listen to bbc for 10 new words or I will read book in this week to improve my reading*" but social goals were a weekly occurrence.

In week 6 Shivani wrote*: I do more appointment myself. Before I have no confidence. And [now] I talk myself with them.* This marks an important psychological shift in Shivani where she finally feels confident enough to take charge of her personal affairs. Finally, in week 12 she concludes:

> *"I believe that I have improved in speaking as well cause I speak more than before. I don't feel shy like before".*

But Shivani was not the only person in the group who experienced such a positive change. Other learners, too, reported a positive impact of goal setting on their confidence or levels of personal independence which along with improved language skills allowed them to participate more fully in important to them areas of life such as a child's education, social life or entertainment, e.g.:

> *"Yes, I believe I am more confident than before in helping my daughter's homework."*
>
> *"I improved my English and now I am more confident and independent. Now I can speak English and understand what other speaking."*

“When at first I started the course for my was very difficult. The teacher spoke in the class I couldn't understand everything. Now I can read the book, newspaper and watch TV I understand the meaning than before. I do shopping [by] myself [and] book appointments. I learn new words with the meaning and improve my spelling as well.”

The responses above confirm my suspicion that giving learners the opportunity to set their own goals may have a wider impact. They also support the view that taking responsibility for organising their own language practice may have advantages that reach beyond language learning. Similar responses were given when students were asked if they had achieved anything special or important as a result of goal setting. 11 of them confirmed that this was the case, e.g.:

“Yes now I confidently talk in English with my friends and I can go out alone. I can teach my kids. I was also able to communicate in English when I was on holiday in Dubai.”

“Yes I achieved something very important that is motivation which I learned in the class, how to motivate myself towards my long term goals. Secondly, I am better in tenses than before.”

“I achieved more confidence, I am talking more fluently with other people now.”

“I am very proud of a result of writing. I can fill the form and answer the email.”

“I achieved one special thing. That is I can speak in English a little bit with my child friends and neighbours, anyone.”

These outcomes may seem intangible to you or me. But they are no doubt very tangible to the learners who expressed them. The newly discovered confidence and independence allowed them to do things that only twelve weeks earlier they thought of only as dreams and aspirations. Now that they had achieved them, they are justifiably proud. And why shouldn’t they be. Being able to communicate well with neighbours, help their children with homework or being more independent are all reasons to be proud of - reasons to celebrate.

Much of what has been said so far in this section confirms my thesis that goal setting can have a positive impact on learners' perceived language skills. The inclusion of the last question here (i.e. Do you feel your English has improved as a result of creating your own learning goals?) is therefore largely a formality. In fact, as I reported in the previous chapter, all 12 participants felt that their English had improved, and they attributed it to goal setting or more specifically to aspects of it. Learner responses to this question are reiterations of the points that have been made so far and lend support for the notion that goal setting can enhance learners' ability to self-regulate and have a powerful motivating function (Dornyei and Otto, 1998).

To this end, learners highlight the positive effects of scheduling activities which allowed them to fit learning in their busy lives, e.g.:

> *"Setting goals made difference and my English improved because you have a timetable."*
>
> *"My English is improved and goals book very helpful when you planning for week."*
>
> *"Setting goals made me more punctual and did work on time."*
>
> *"Setting goals made a difference and my English has improved because I use goals every week."*

Setting goals also allowed learners to reflect on their own language skills, identify and prioritise gaps in their knowledge, e.g.:

> *"By setting goals I tried to focus on the areas in which I was weak and I have improved better."*
>
> *"Yes, it shows me my priorities and gives me direction to study with more focus on my goals*."
>
> *"Yes, setting goals made a huge difference and I just forgot before what I want to achieve and how I can achieve it. But now I have set up more goals in my life."*

Needless to say, being able to identify and address our weaknesses is a particularly important skill in all learning let alone language learning.

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, learners in this cohort also took a test at the start of the course which was then repeated at the end. The test covered their knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing skills. The results of both the pre-test and the post-test were discussed at the end of the course. The test scores reveal that learners did indeed improve their language skills and knowledge improving on average by almost 10 points from an average of 25 points at the start of the course to an average of 34.5 points at the end (or from 50% to almost 69%). However, it is important to stress that these results cannot be attributed to goal setting alone and are likely to be an outcome of a range of factors.

Final thought

The discussion in this chapter has provided ample evidence that setting goals can be beneficial in an ESOL classroom especially when it is the learners who are in charge of setting them rather than the teachers or the institutions. Doing so places learners in a unique position where they hold the key to their own success. Where they can make decisions about their learning based on their desires and aspirations and on what is and is not possible. It creates an environment in which learners can count on one another for support, ideas and encouragement. One in which the success they experience motivates not only them but is also a source of inspiration and motivation for others. We have seen that passing this responsibility onto the learners can be empowering. The increase in autonomy leads to enhanced problem solving and greater motivation to engage in language learning practices such as self-directed study and greater use of the language outside the classroom. Putting ESOL learners in charge of planning their own learning activities through setting goals creates conditions in which an improved language competence is an almost inevitable outcome. But it is not the only outcome. The prevalence of social goals at least in this cohort also means that the effects of goal setting have a much wider reach. The inclusion of ‘unsuspecting victims’ such as family

members, friends and neighbours in their own learning, strengthens relationships and contributes to greater community cohesion.

The next chapter will conclude the thesis by providing a summary of its main lessons. It will also be an opportunity to revisit the context in which the study took place, consider the findings in that context and to make tentative recommendations.

Epilogue

The class has just ended, the learners have left and I decide to go to a nearby cafe where I'd arranged to meet with Babak and Kulvinder. It's February and it has just started to rain. Quite heavily in fact. I'm slightly concerned about how I'm going to get home. I've got my bicycle but no waterproofs. As I'm wallowing in self-pity, Kulvinder and Babak arrive. They smile when they see me and I get us all hot drinks to warm up. Two coffees and a full fat hot chocolate for Babak!

"I'm now focusing on learning coding. I'm improving in different ways." says Babak when I ask him about what he has been up to. Since leaving the course Babak has been putting his new skills into practice. He has signed up onto a coding course at the college and is planning his career as a software developer. He's still learning English but now he's at an FE college. He's not very happy about the ESOL course, though: "The teachers are great," he says, "but I'm not learning as much. Sometimes, I learn only one new thing."

However, Kulvinder has noticed a difference in Babak's English: "When I first met you in the class, you used to speak so slowly!" She said laughing. "But now you've improved so much. You speak fluently and clearly!" We discuss the merits of 'slow' talking for a while with Kulvinder musing whether people who speak fast try to hide something. Soon, however, our conversation turns 'philosophical' when I raise the topic of belonging.

"Perhaps I don't feel like I belong more in this country, yet, but I definitely feel like I belong less in my country!" Babak tells us. "Sometimes I think how I would feel if I went back to

my country for one week. Would I like it? And then I think 'oh that's crazy I wouldn't like to go back.' For example, in the UK I've seen people who read books on the Tube and I wanted to do it as well. When I opened a book on the tube in Tehran people would ask "who do you think you are!" When I saw that here I thought 'great there are many people like me.' I felt I'm normal and I'm happy here!" Kulvinder nods in agreement, adding. "In India people listen to loud music on the buses. If you try to read a book, they think you are better than them!" I can't help but wonder how something as trivial as reading a book on public transport can be so significant to some people!

Before we finish, Babak has one more confession to make, "Setting goals helped me to plan my life. When we were doing the goals in the class we had a long goal and weekly goals that helped us with the long goal. This helped me to realize that in life my career goals are my long goals and everything that I do should help me achieve those goals." I'm happy for Babak and as we're saying our goodbyes I have a feeling that they'll do fine. Me? I'll get wet!

Chapter 6 (conclusion & recommendations) - Lessons learnt

"When things do not go your way, remember that every challenge — every adversity — contains within it the seeds of opportunity and growth."

— Roy T. Bennett

United Kingdom, AD 2017

When I started working on this thesis in 2017 Theresa May, the British Prime Minister at the time, had just lost her already tiny majority in parliament but managed to cling on to power and Jeremy Corbyn was the rising star of the Labour party having made large gains up and down the country. (Bizarrely, Mrs. May was widely viewed as the loser of the elections despite actually winning them and Mr Corbyn the winner despite losing!) (Bush, 2017)

This meant that the austerity programme introduced by Mrs. May's predecessor, David Cameron, and his Chancellor, George Osbourne, could continue to wreak havoc in people's lives and in society. And wreak havoc it did. The impact of austerity was felt across all segments of UK society. Children were more likely to live in poverty than at any time since before the Second World War (Toynbee & Walker 2020); the nation's health was deteriorating as a result of cuts (in real terms) to people's incomes and growing poverty among vulnerable groups (Boseley, 2020; Mueller, 2019); life expectancy in Britain had flatlined and even reversed for women in the most deprived areas for the first time in over a century (ibid); more and more people had to rely on food banks for their staples (Toynbee & Walker 2020) budget cuts coupled with sanctions against benefits claimants being the likely culprits responsible for the doubling of their use between 2015 and 2017 (Mueller, 2019); reduction in the police numbers and reductions in spending on

youth services and social services coincided with the rise in the incidence of serious crimes such as murder and robbery (Mueller, 2019).

The education sector had not quite escaped the savage budget cuts, either. Despite promises that education was going to be ring-fenced, an analysis by the House of Commons Library found that in real terms spending on schools and colleges had slumped from £95.5bn in 2011/12 to £87.8bn in 2018, a total fall of £7.7bn (Buchan, 2019) with the poorest likely paying the highest price and further deepening inequalities. As discussed in Chapter 1 reductions in the Adult Education Budget had a knock-on effect on funding for the much-needed ESOL classes affecting some of the most vulnerable, deprived and isolated communities in the country. At the same time when some ministers were advocating a greater need for integration and community cohesion and recommending that this be achieved through an effective provision of language learning for migrants (HM Government, 2018), their colleagues in the government had cut funding for ESOL by 50% (Runnymede, 2018). The funding that remained came with much tighter conditions or eligibility criteria. Colleges were reporting long waiting lists of up to 1000 students for their ESOL courses with waiting times up to 6 months (Foster & Bolton, 2017; Runnymede, 2018).

By 2017 the ‘migration crisis’ of 2015 had been largely ‘contained’ after the EU offered Turkey money to host refugees and prevent more from arriving, mainly from Syria (Ellyatt, 2018). However, in the UK migration continued to be a hot topic. In 2017 there were still more people coming to the UK than leaving although the overall net migration to the UK had fallen (ONS, 2017). The ugly anti-immigration rhetoric used during the Brexit campaign had been as effective at ‘containing’ migration into the UK as the financial ‘aid’ the EU offered Turkey. Over three-quarters of the decrease in net migration could be accounted for by EU citizens (ONS, 2017)

May’s ongoing leadership also meant that the hostile environment and immigration policy she had initiated whilst Home Secretary in 2012 could continue. Among other things, the policy required professionals in health, education, social work, finance and housing to act as de-facto border guards (Kirkaldy, 2019). Even though we had yet to find out what Brexit actually meant (despite the emphatic assertions that Brexit actually meant Brexit!), May’s immigration policy gave us a glimpse of what it might look like. A 2017 article in the Guardian reported that detentions and enforced removals of all foreign nationals, including EU citizens, had risen sharply as if emboldened by the 2016 EU referendum

(Hill, 2017). In fact, deportations of EU citizens were at their highest since records began, with 5,301 EU nationals removed during the year ending June 2017 (ibid). Stories of British nationals falling in love and wishing to marry foreigners only to find themselves at the wrong end of an uncaring bureaucracy had become common (ibid). This also applied to anyone living in the UK without the right paperwork, even if that paperwork was given to them when they moved here as children (ibid). This is probably best epitomized by the Windrush scandal which showed how precarious the situation of migrants in the UK really is.

In chapter one, I described the study as one that *covers a small geographical area of London and looks at a very focused aspect of language teaching and learning (i.e. goal setting and motivation),* but I also acknowledged that *the context in which it was set was much broader*; namely, the context of global migration caused by conflict and economic situations in 'source countries'. The chapter provided an opportunity to consider this wider context and its implications closer to home. As I was researching and then quoting the migration statistics, the interconnectedness of the world became immediately apparent. Socio-political situation, conflict, poverty or desperation uproot people. What happens in seemingly distant places such as Aleppo, Kabul or Deli and less remote places such as Vilnius, Warsaw or Madrid will quite soon be felt in affluent western capitals such as London or Berlin. From Brexit to community cohesion, to the provision of English classes, to issues relating to housing, education or health, in one way or another all these local events and local issues have been affected by events elsewhere in the world.

Finally, I felt that whilst at a superficial level the study was about learning English as a second language, it was important to extend its wider context to include people's feelings and perceptions. This included concerns such as a sense of belonging in a new place, as well as the dreams and aspirations we have when we arrive in a new country; after all, knowledge of the language of the host country and the ability to communicate well in it, play an important part in the integration process.

Here too, it was also evident from the start that language teachers and language courses had an important place in this context. Not only do teachers deliver the classes, but also they play a vital role in promoting integration and community cohesion. Through classroom activities, choice of topics, learner interactions, teachers establish a culture in which friendships are formed and stereotypes are challenged. It is a culture that extends far beyond the classroom and into the community.

However, even as I was citing the statistics, the one thing that did not become immediately apparent to me were the real people and their stories behind those numbers. Yes, we do see people from around the world especially in places like London but how often do we really think about the circumstances under which they arrived here. Or perhaps it was just me who could not see beyond the numbers. At the time I was still focused on what I thought was the core aspect of my thesis, namely, goal setting for language learning. A topic that, in my view at the time, sat squarely within cognitive sciences, namely psychology and linguistics and was inherently positivist in nature. A significant part of my literature review focused on largely positivist studies, although, I also started to recognise the dissonance between strictly positivist views, such as Behaviourism, and the context in which this study was situated. However, it was not until chapter 3, which sent me on an intellectual journey during which I was able to critically evaluate my own ontological and epistemological positions, that I finally accepted that the context of my study demanded more than cold numbers. I realized that direct observation advocated by positivists is not the only way of knowing about the world and that sometimes we need to delve deeper into the object of our inquiry to gain a more profound understanding of it as advocated by interpretivism. (The chapter was ultimately titled: *Ontological and Epistemological Deliberations (ramblings of a reformed positivist)* which I felt captured the essence of this intellectual journey quite well!)

I understood that this study involved people who lived through the events I was writing about; people for whom these events were more than just newspaper headlines. Some of them had experienced conflict and a harrowing journey, some came here to marry and start families. All were the subject of an often negative, biased and one-sided narrative in the media. Migrants are rarely given the opportunity to tell their own side of the story. In a recent Evening Standard article, author Steve Ali (a Syrian refugee himself), notes that when stories relating to the refugee crisis were being reported back in 2015, one side was conspicuously missing from the coverage - that of refugees themselves (Ali, 2020). I realized that I would be doing my participants a great disservice if their side of the story was not included in the thesis. As a practitioner-researcher I was also in a unique position to bring their voices to the fore. Part teacher, part researcher, I was embedded in the context I was researching. Narrative inquiry, my chosen research methodology, allowed me to involve my learners in the study, to work collaboratively with them constructing the narrative of their experiences together. This does not mean that I had to deviate from my original research objectives. In fact, involving learners in constructing the narrative

enhanced the study by allowing me to delve deeper into the subjective world of human experience. It provided a level of detail that went beyond any quantitative data that a study like this could generate and hence deepened my understanding of what makes my learners tick as well as of the numerous barriers they face and how they manage to counteract them.

Working as an action researcher within the interpretivist paradigm, did not mean that I had to compromise on the rigour and quality of my research, either. Despite working with a small group of participants I was able to establish credibility and confirmability by triangulating various sources of data, e.g. survey responses, analysis of goal books, departmental records (e.g. pre/post-tests) and extended interviews. This provided opportunities to paint a detailed picture not only of the impact of goal setting on the participants and their learning but also of the participants themselves.

This study was therefore a response to the cuts introduced as part of the austerity measures which resulted in the reduction of available college places. It was a search for an alternative model of learning which would help learners to develop the skills to continue to study when not in the classroom, to take charge of their learning and thus not be disadvantaged by the reduced hours of input.

However, this was only partly the motivation for this study. Partly, because learner independence and autonomy are important skills in and of themselves. As I pointed out in chapter one, the ability to organize and direct learning independently of the teacher and outside of the classroom is key to successful language learning. However, it also needs to be noted that independent learning where learners seek opportunities to practise their language skills in their communities may foster greater community cohesion and integration. This is particularly important for migrant ESOL learners in the UK many of whom despite living in an English speaking country often find themselves isolated from a wider linguistic community.

Finally, as I discovered later, it was to involve my participants in the study by creating a platform for them to tell their own story, so that their views could also be represented and their voices heard. I can only hope that I gave them justice.

The lessons

So what are the key messages from this study? The study posed practical, pertinent questions which arose directly from the aforementioned context, namely, whether setting goals can be used effectively with adult ESOL learners to facilitate their language learning and development. The discussion in chapter 5 confirmed convincingly that goal setting was implemented successfully in the class in which the study took place. Using a combination of surveys, interviews, goal books and departmental records, I was able to demonstrate that learners responded positively to setting goals and benefited from this activity.

Lesson 1 - goal setting promotes agency and autonomy

This, as we saw, led to an increased sense of agency and autonomy. I explored these ideas in my first research question which rendered some interesting findings. In addition to confirming the positive impact of goal setting on agency and autonomy, I also discovered that when given the opportunity to choose their learning goals learners favoured social goals that involved their friends, neighbours or members of the family. The ability to communicate with a wider community was in fact an important course (long term) goal for the majority of the participants.

Moreover, it transpired that there were multiple dimensions to the social goals, such as:

- instrumental (i.e. communication as a way to greater personal independence, e.g. ability to communicate in shops, GP, etc),
- integrative (i.e. the desire to 'understand people' and be able to better participate in and contribute to the wider community)
- Social contact as a linguistic affordance (e.g. speaking to a neighbour to practise English)

This was also reflected in learners' support (weekly) goals which, too, included social interactions with friends, family members (including children) and members of the public.

This again involved deliberate attempts to make friends in order to practise English with them.

This is very encouraging and promising in terms of the potential of goal setting for fostering integration and community cohesion.

Lesson 2 - autonomy leads to greater creativity when faced with setbacks

However, the preference for social goals is not the only interesting finding that came out of the first research question. The emergence of autonomous learning behaviour also led to flexibility and creativity when faced with setbacks. This was shown when instead of giving up on a goal, learners were more likely to respond imaginatively and to seek solutions or alternative courses of action in order to complete it.

Learners also tended to display creativity by identifying opportunities to practise English in their daily lives. This often involved 'piggybacking' on activities they engaged in already, such as practising new vocabulary in conversations with friends or family members, assisting with children's homework or bedtime reading time (the latter two involved careful preparation, e.g. pronunciation and meaning of new vocabulary, formation of questions, etc).

Lesson 3 - autonomous behaviour must be nurtured

We cannot assume that autonomous behaviour will emerge spontaneously. Neither can we assume that learners will have the skills or confidence to be able to identify learning opportunities around them let alone take advantage of them. It is important that we create an autonomy supportive environment where learners are encouraged and empowered to make their own learning decisions.

Initially I thought I had achieved this by giving learners the space to conceptualize and then discuss their goals. This, as we saw, was done in a regular, frequent and consistent way. Yet, as I discovered later, despite the careful planning and consideration given to

the design of the study, learners' behaviour was still not entirely autonomous. The advantage of doing interviews with participants is that they reveal things that surveys, let alone quantitative data, are likely to miss. One such revelation was an admission two of my learners made in an interview that (despite my effort to encourage autonomous and self-regulated behaviour) they initially completed their goals to 'please' me. However, what the interviews also revealed was that with time and thanks to the consistency of the approach, they internalised this behaviour having recognised the inherent value of setting goals by themselves and for themselves.

Lesson 4 - goals have a motivating function

The interplay between goals and motivation was explored in the second question of this thesis. As discussed in the previous chapter the findings were largely in line with the research literature. They confirmed that goals energize and spur us into action. They promote behaviours that minimize distractions and facilitate task completion such as a sense of focus and direction. Learners in my sample were more likely to complete their tasks when they scheduled them as goals.

The potential of goals to motivate was further enhanced by a sense of ownership that came from planning and making their own learning decisions. The interviews revealed that when learners did not complete tasks they had set as goals they experienced cognitive dissonance which manifested itself as a feeling of guilt or disappointment with themselves. This sense of guilt coupled with the energizing power of deadlines proved to be effective in overcoming procrastination and made it more likely for the tasks to be completed.

Lesson 5 - achieving goals is rewarding and encourages persistence

That achieving goals can be rewarding is hardly a revelation. The tiny jolt of dopamine we get when we tick an item off a list feels very satisfying and can be enough to keep us going. This study does confirm that. And yet this is a skill that we rarely promote in our

classes. What this study reveals is that there is value in helping learners to develop this skill for several reasons. For example, the findings of this study showed that goals helped learners to stay focused which was particularly relevant to a group of adult learners who lead very busy lives and have to fit learning between managing households, looking after children, etc.

This study also found that the satisfaction gained from completing goals may have a reinforcing effect on the learning behaviour. It marks progress and provides immediate feedback and incentive which in turn allows us to maintain an activity over time.

Finally, setting goals in the classroom allowed learners to think about their reasons for joining the course and to consider this decision in the context of their dreams and future plans. For many of them it was the long-term goals that kept them going. They learnt how to break those goals into more manageable and achievable weekly tasks the completion of which brought them closer to achieving their plans or fulfilling their dreams. What can be more satisfying?

Lesson 6 - setting goals cooperatively in the class can lead to healthy competition

Asking learners to set their goals and complete their goal books in the classroom, was a deliberate attempt to promote cooperation. It was important that this activity was completed in a supportive environment in which students could discuss and compare their goals, swap tips and learning resources as well as share and celebrate the progress they had made against their goals. I wanted learners to support one another but also to set themselves as examples for themselves. What this study revealed was that this environment also promoted a sense of competitiveness. Ultimately this was not a bad thing. It seems that hearing others share their achievements had a formative effect. It allowed learners to identify gaps in their own knowledge and activated a learning process by stimulating them to do better.

Lesson 7 - setting goals can lead to an increase in language use outside of the class

The link between goal setting and its impact on the use of English outside of the classroom was investigated in my third research question. My hope when setting up this study was that when thinking about their goals learners would consider their environments and identify opportunities to practise English within those environments. The findings indicate that this was indeed what happened. Learners' preference for setting social goals meant that they were also more likely to act on them. The evidence presented suggested that they engaged in social interactions with greater consistency. The opportunities came from learners' most immediate environments such as at home with their family members as well as from further afield such as joining communities, churches, etc. Moreover, the study provided some evidence that when engaging in social interactions, learners were more likely to focus on accuracy and to pay more attention to the linguistic input around them. For some learners this resulted in more confidence and independence when dealing with day-to-day situations where English was required.

Lesson 8 - goal setting can (and should) complement language instruction in adult settings

Learner autonomy, motivation to study, greater persistence and confidence are all very positive outcomes of setting goals. Ultimately, however, the study was about helping learners to improve their language skills which is what the final research question explored. The previous chapter reports on how learners in the study improved their language skills. This was evidenced by their self-reports and their post-test scores. However, I was careful not to attribute this finding to goal setting alone. Instead, arguing that these improvements had to be viewed in the wider context of this study in which the goals that learners set and completed played an important part. As discussed already, handing over the responsibility for organising their own language practice to the learners may reach beyond the classroom. Setting goals on a week-by-week basis allowed them to explore and access opportunities for practising English in their own environments -

opportunities they may not have realized existed. This, as discussed previously, had a positive knock-on effect on community cohesion but also maximized learners' language exposure and practice. Granted, not every goal was always completed each week, but setting them made their completion more likely. Completing their weekly goals also meant that the majority of the learners in the class were able to achieve their self-set course goals which covered language related areas such as communication and reading skills as well as grammar and vocabulary.

The contribution

The findings of this study (as presented in the previous chapter and summarized here) deepen our understanding of the effects of goal setting in community ESOL classes as well as its impact on the wider community. Emergence of autonomy, internalisation of the behaviour regulating process, healthy competition and prevalence of social goals are but a few examples of the contributions to knowledge (albeit modest) this has made.

This study also demonstrated that an alternative model of learning is possible. One that empowers learners and enables them to take charge of their learning outside the classroom thus addressing the shortfall of funded places.

But this study has made another important contribution, namely, to our understanding of what it means to apply narrative inquiry in community learning contexts - both for the researcher and the participants. Narrative inquiry, despite being around for some time, is not well known within education research. And yet, as I found, it has a lot of potential for this area of research. As a researcher taking this approach, I was able to get to know my participants well which made it possible for me to really 'look under the bonnet' and co-construct the narrative of their experience with them. Doing so allowed me not only to systematically gather and analyse information but also to represent their story through their experiences as told by them. The emphasis on 'they' is not frivolous. The idea of 'voice' has been discussed earlier in the chapter, but it is worth reiterating here. Migrants are an underrepresented community whose voice is seldom heard. Narrative inquiry gave their voice the prominence it deserved, so it could be heard, and in doing so we gained a better understanding not only of what it means to be an ESOL learner (using goals to

learn English) but also of what it means to be a member of an underrepresented group in the UK.

The empowerment resulting from narrative inquiry also impacts on the researcher. As discussed earlier, carrying out a research study within narrative inquiry deepened my understanding of the processes involved in carrying out research within educational and community settings. I was also able to challenge my assumptions and to look critically at my own beliefs about what constitutes 'proper' research. And just as I was able to co-construct the narrative with my students to tell their stories, I was also able to tell my own story of 'doing' research and describe the change I had undergone in my thinking in a way that captured the human and personal dimension of this experience over time. As such it was both liberating and revealing and made an important and valuable contribution to my development as a researcher. Narrative inquiry presents an opportunity for fellow researchers to explore alternative research methods and not get stuck in one way of thinking.

Finally, although this study focuses on goal setting and its implications, it also contributes to the discussion around the use of Individual Learning Plans, an area that is largely underrepresented in the literature. It provides details of a working model which could be used by teachers as an alternative to the standard ILP model and process. But more on this next.

ILP re-engineered?

These eight lessons summarize some of the key findings of this study. They also emphasize the benefits of goal setting for ESOL learners which as we saw are quite numerous. So, should goal setting be used in the ways discussed above and is this model a viable alternative to Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)?

Much of the criticism of ILPs highlighted in Hamilton's report centred around the ways in which they had become a tool for performance management rather than for learning. This undermines the social interactions between tutors and learners and creates a vastly divergent perception of the value of this document between the two key groups of stakeholders, i.e. teachers/students and managers/funders. As such the ILP had little

value for the teachers, who viewed this document as an administrative burden and a box ticking exercise (Hamilton, 2009). They completed it to comply with management and funding requirements and often set generic goals taken from lists to save time (ibid). The document had little value for the learners who found it confusing and were unable to appreciate any possible significance when signing it (ibid). Conversely, ILPs had much (financial) value to the management who retained it for audit purposes.

The design of this study sought to redress this imbalance by putting learners at the centre of the goal setting process. A process where they could be in charge of important learning decisions based on their own plans, dreams and aspirations. Through this process learners owned not only the goals but also the goal books which in their hands became useful learning tools. Far from being locked in safe and secure filing cabinets, they became live and dynamic documents which served as planners, reminders, diaries and progress checkers.

The teacher's role, my role, in this process was to provide guidance and to facilitate goal setting. It was also to suggest options and provide support when required; however, here too learners were encouraged to seek ideas from their peers first. An important aspect of this process was to ensure consistency. For many learners setting goals was a new skill which would take some time to learn and to bed in. Providing a structure to goal setting, helped learners to establish a routine of setting and reviewing goals. Although engaging in goal setting was voluntary and there were no penalties for not completing goals nor prizes for completing them (except, maybe, the 'show and tell' type celebrations when learners could show off what they had learnt), the class structure of setting and reviewing goals created an expectation that this would be done. This expectation was implied and never explicitly stated and yet learners intuitively accepted it as a class rule. As such this implementation of the process proved to be successful to which the summary above is a testament.

That being said, it wasn't all scones and clotted cream. It is a process that worked but it did not remove all the criticisms raised by teachers in Hamilton's (2009) review. For example, it did require both classroom and teacher time to be allocated to the process. This study showed that motivation and autonomy can develop if sufficiently nurtured and fostered. This requires consistency which inevitably places demands on the time of teachers, students and timetabling. Some teachers may feel that this time could be better

spent on teaching, however, as this thesis reveals this was justified if it led to more independent language use and practice outside of the formal classroom.

Moreover, ILPs are still required by organisations for managerial and funding reasons and completing goal books in addition to ILPs could be seen as creating extra work for teachers. Although I was able to replace ILPs with goal books this might not be possible in other settings. However, as discussed earlier there is nothing inherently wrong with ILPs and the goal setting method that underpins this document is sound. Giving learners more ownership of this document by linking the mid- and long-term goals to their personal aspirations and supplementing those with weekly support goals (recorded by learners separately if necessary) could bring the use of ILPs closer in line with the model I have suggested. The process also requires teachers' buy-in. Without it, ILPs will continue to be perceived as a frustrating bureaucratic box-ticking exercise that takes them away from the 'real' work of teaching, learning and assessment.

Finally, this study and its findings should serve as guidance only. We need to be mindful of individual and group idiosyncrasies which could affect the outcomes. In this case, this study involved a particular group of learners with unique backgrounds and motivations. It was a small group which, with one exception, was comprised mostly of young adult women of Asian background. They were also mostly economically inactive, with childcare and household responsibilities. A different group of learners, e.g. a group made up of people of different ages, sexes, ethnic backgrounds, in different parts of the country, could create different class dynamics. Different learners could also have different aspirations, attitudes and motivations which could render different outcomes. This in itself is potentially an interesting area of future research.

The study also involved a teacher researcher who despite trying to remain objective, had a vested interest in making sure that the method worked. This may have made him more committed to the goal setting process. Other teachers may not have the same level of commitment to the methodology or be equally involved. This, too, could have an impact on the effectiveness of this approach.

These are important considerations and one should keep them in mind when deciding whether or not to use this methodology. That said, these findings also lend themselves to a number of recommendations for teachers, students, management and policy makers.

Recommendations

Teachers are one group that will find the findings of this study particularly relevant. It is they who work with students and set ILP goals. The study makes a number of practical suggestions that could be used by teachers to make the goal setting process more meaningful for learners and therefore more impactful. For example, handing over the responsibility for goal setting to the learners and making it a collaborative activity will foster learner autonomy. Embedding the cycle of setting and reviewing goals into the class schedule will lead to consistency and increase the likelihood of routine taking hold. It will also make goal setting part of teaching and learning where celebrating successes and achievements of goals in the class will not only be rewarding for the students (as well as the teachers), but it will also allow them to learn from one another by comparing their progress against other students. This, in turn, will promote formative learning processes such as identifying their strengths and gaps in knowledge in relation to their peers. Ultimately, the study shows that there is a scope for teachers to re-think goal setting in the classroom including their use of ILPs. Doing it differently can help learners to maximize their language exposure and practice. It can also increase their confidence and independence when dealing with day-to-day situations where English is required.

Another group for whom these findings will be instructive are the learners themselves. I am conscious that it is unlikely that many (if any) learners will ever read this thesis, but it is through teachers that these findings can be communicated to them. The benefits for the learners are self-evident and do not need to be reiterated here; however, it is important to stress that setting goals involves a set of meta cognitive skills such as planning and reflection which most learners will have to develop. Needless to say, this will be possible only with teachers' support and through the establishment of a supportive and collaborative class culture.

Policy makers and management will note that with a few tweaks to the way the ILP is 'administered', it is possible to promote behaviours that can facilitate greater integration of ESOL students into the wider society. However, for those 'few tweaks' to happen, there has to be a fundamental shift in thinking about what (or rather who) this document is for. There has to be a liberalisation of the ILP process whereby this document can be used as it was first intended, namely, to facilitate learning which, for all intents and purposes,

it currently does not. For teachers to truly embrace this document or, at least, to start viewing it as part of the real work of teaching and learning, ILPs have to be deinstitutionalized and 'uncoupled' from the funding requirements. This would create conditions under which teachers and learners could take a shared ownership of this process and start using ILPs flexibly to foster learning in and out of the classroom with all its potential for the community and the society as a whole.

So to go back to the questions I posed at the beginning of this section: should we all use goal setting it the way I described it and is this model a viable alternative to Individual Learning Plans? These questions can only be answered by the reader (whoever they are). I can only hope that I have made a sufficiently strong case to convince them to give it a go. They may yet be surprised by the results.

But perhaps there is no longer a need for redesigning ILPs in this way. After all this study arose from a socio-political situation three years ago. Are the issues raised in this study still relevant today?

United Kingdom, AD 2020

Fast forward three years and it seems like everything has changed but nothing has changed. (Well almost nothing. I will come back to this later.) Firstly, both Mrs May and Mr Corbyn have been relegated to the annals of history. Following the botched election of 2017 Mrs May's position as the party leader became untenable and although she managed to hang on to power, she was eventually forced to resign in 2019. Her successor Boris Johnson, called for another election which he ran on the promise to 'get Brexit done'. This time the Conservatives' victory was absolute. Labour under Corbyn's leadership was humiliated with the Red Wall (northern constituencies which always voted Labour) crumbling for the first time in the party's history. The large parliamentary majority would finally allow Mr Johnson to get Brexit done. In fact, the UK officially left the EU in January 2020, and yet, as I'm writing these words, we are still none the wiser when it comes to Brexit and what it will look like.

Immigration continues to be a hot topic. It seems that Britain is being 'invaded' again this time by a flotilla of hundreds of migrants crossing the Channel on dinghies apparently

‘encouraged’ by the French Navy (Johnson, 2020). So unnerved was Priti Patel, the Home Secretary in Johnson’s government, by this state of affairs that she reportedly *called on the Royal Navy to help tackle the growing number of small boats and appointed a former Royal Marine, Dan O’Mahoney, to the role of “clandestine Channel threat commander”* (Walker and Murray, 2020). Those who do manage to cross the Channel safely should not rejoice either. If Mrs Patel has her way, they may soon end up on a volcanic island in the South Atlantic (Walker and Murray, 2020) which is arguably more extreme than anything that Mrs May could come up with (although later she may have revised those plans to include locations closer to home such as Morocco and Moldavia (Lewis, et. al. 2020). Future immigrants may not get to these shores at all but be ‘processed’ on floating asylum centres (converted old ferries) instead (Lewis, et. al. 2020).

Whether or not these plans come to fruition one thing is quite apparent - the hostile environment introduced by Mrs May is still popular in 2020. In fact, there is evidence that it has become even more hostile. A recent Guardian article quotes a Whitehall source familiar with the government plans saying that there was a push by Downing Street to “radically beef-up the hostile environment” in 2021 following the end of the Brexit transition (Lewis, et. al. 2020).

However, it appears that migrants to the UK did not get the memo. In the year ending March 2020 the net migration to the UK stood at 313,000 (compared to 230,000 in 2017) (ONS, 2017&2020).

In this climate, funding for ESOL courses continues to be challenging. However, there have been some positive developments, too. This is largely due to the recognition that it is impossible to achieve community cohesion, economic and personal independence without a degree of linguistic competence in the host country’s language. Following the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper released in March 2018 which I referred to in Chapter 1, the government published the Integrated Communities Strategy Action Plan ‘to drive forward work across Government to create socially and economically stronger, more confident and integrated communities’ (HM Government, 2019:5). The document listed the key priorities that came out of the Green Paper as well as a progress against them. Boosting English language was one of the priorities and the government made sure to put its money where its mouth was and made £5.7 million available for projects in 2019. This was increased to £6.5 million in 2020/21 (£5 million to support taught sessions to participants at New to ESOL (Pre-Entry – Entry Level 1) by qualified

ESOL practitioners; and £1.5 million for social mixing opportunities for the whole ESOL community through clubs and activities). In London which is home to over 50% of the country's ESOL provision, this funding is likely to be additionally boosted by the Greater London Authority (GLA) which is due to take control of London's Adult Education Budget. Under the GLA plans, ESOL provision is to be fully funded up to Entry Level 3, thus creating progression pathways for learners completing lower level courses (Whieldon, 2019). The GLA hopes this will show that London is "open to talent and will support Londoners to get the skills they need to succeed" (Whieldon, 2019).

This certainly is good news - any funding that will create new ESOL places is welcome news. However, challenges remain. Putting aside the fact that the omission of funding for more advanced courses (L1 and L2) may lock individuals out of vocational and professional courses for which a greater language competence is required, the £6.5 million feels almost tokenistic in the context of the funding cuts for ESOL which fell from £212.3m in 2008 to £105m in 2018 (Refugee Action, 2019). This means that demand continues to outstrip supply (to put it crudely!). Organisations and charities continue to receive requests for ESOL courses which they cannot accommodate, and many individuals find themselves waiting for up to 3 years to join classes (Hubble, et. al. 2019).

In addition, learning to speak English does not always guarantee integration. As discussed in pervious chapters, even when learners do manage to secure a place on an ESOL course, they often end up using English within the classroom only and miss out on opportunities that exist outside of this formal environment. Setting goals helps learners to become more aware of these opportunities and thus more likely to consider and access them. It also helps them to develop independence and personal responsibility not only for their learning decisions but also, through long term goals, for their futures. Learning to set goals helps to make learners more resilient in the long term as they become better equipped to deal with challenges such as for example funding fluctuations which they will be able to address and overcome through imagination and creativity as they pursue their dreams.

In many ways the socio-political situation in 2020 resembles that of 2017 and many of the problems that led to this study are present today with one notable exception - 2020 has been the year of a global pandemic.

AD 2020 - a year like no other

To say that 2020 has been a year like no other may be an understatement. It has been a year when a viral outbreak caused a global pandemic, shut down entire countries, their economies and claimed the lives of tens of thousands of their citizens. The country in a lockdown, it has been a year of furlough schemes for some and homeworking for others. A year of deserted streets, unkempt haircuts and perpetual ZOOM meetings. It has been a year in which the NHS staff became national heroes after they continued providing outstanding levels of care despite years of chronic underfunding, severe PPE shortages and working upwards of 16-hour shifts. It has also been a year when many of us had to adapt to this new reality of remote working and develop completely new skillsets. For teachers and students this meant embracing (reluctantly in some cases) technology to run and attend online lessons. Many of us have adapted quite well. As is often the case, necessity unleashed creativity. Teachers continued to teach employing a range of strategies and technologies to do so. Online/ZOOM classes have become the new mainstay of ESOL teaching. Whatsapp and other social media groups have been set up to enable teachers and students to communicate with and support one another. However, not everyone has been able to engage. Learners at the lowest levels of English or those with limited access to technology have struggled to adapt to this new reality. Some organisations have been able to respond to this by providing hardware to students, but this can be expensive and not everyone can afford it. Online teaching is more manageable and thus more effective when the groups are smaller. This may mean splitting larger groups, more teaching hours for teachers which comes with additional cost. Given that this situation is likely to continue, NATECLA - the professional organisation for ESOL teachers - issued a call to action for additional ESOL funding to address this need (NATECLA, 2020).

In this context, too, goal setting can be a useful and important skill. In this study, setting goals helped learners to stay on track and search for creative solutions when faced with a setback. These are the skills that we need now more than ever.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Using goal books instructions

How to use your goal book.

If you **really** want to improve your English, it is important that you study or practise English **every day**. I would recommend at least 30 mins per day.

The goal book will help you plan your learning.

1. Start with 3 things that you want to be able to do better at the end of the course (why are you in the class?). Be specific (how will you know that you can do it better?) and realistic (is it possible to achieve this in 12 weeks?). Write these goals on page 4 in your book.
2. Now think about three things you will do this week that will help you achieve the goals on page 4.
3. Write when you will complete these tasks. Think about your day and choose a time when you have some free time to study. Try to block out the same time every week, e.g. *Every Monday at 10 a.m. is my English practice day!*
4. When planning your weekly goals, think about how you will feel when you achieve them, think about the things that may stop you from doing these things (obstacles) and what will you do about them (how will you overcome them). Use WOOP to help you.
   WOOP stands for:

   - **Wish** (what do you want to do)
   - **Outcome** (what do will you learn from it)
   - **Obstacle** (what are the things that may stop you from doing it)
   - **Plan** (use if-then plans, e.g. **if** my friend calls me to chat when I'm supposed to be studying, **then** I will tell them that I will call them later and study for 30 mins first.)

5. There are many things you can do to practise English. We will talk about them in the class but here are a few ideas:
   - You can read news, e.g. on your phone. It can be one article but make sure you look up words that you don't understand. Write sentences with the new words or use them in a conversation to remember them better.

- If you like reading, aim to read for at least 10 mins a day. As above, make sure you focus on new words.
- Helping your children with homework is a great opportunity to practise English. E.g. have fun with spellings by telling stories using the words. Write sentences with new words focusing on their meaning. Whose sentence is more fun/interesting/longer? Can you write a story?, etc.
- Watch an interesting programme in English. It's best to watch on the internet. You'll be able to pause, rewind and play subtitles if you don't understand. Watch the whole show first. Then watch again, e.g. the first 10 mins only but make sure you understand everything. BBC iplayer has very good programmes.
- Use websites to practise grammar, e.g. www.englishpage.com ; www.perfect-english-grammar.com
- Help each other to practise English. Make friends with people on the course. Meet with them and practise speaking but make sure that you 'stretch' yourself, e.g. use new words or the grammar you practised in the class. **Remember you want to get better, not stay the same!**

I'm sure you'll be able to come up with your own ideas. Talk to other learners in the class. See what things they are doing already to practise English. You can make notes below:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix 2 – Goal book - sample pages

My little book of goals

Setting goals

When thinking about your goals, think SMART. Goals should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timebound. For example:

This week:

1. *I'm going to watch two programmes (one hour each) in English.*
2. *I will identify 10 new words and create flashcards to learn them.*
3. *I will talk to two friends about the programmes and speak for 30 mins each time. I will try to use the new words in the conversations.*

3

Week one - My personal goals for the course

List three things you want to be able to do better by the end of the course (why are you in this class?):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

4

My goals for this week

List three things you will do this week that will **stretch** your English:	Say when you will do it.	Have you met your objectives this week? How? Please explain:
1. _____	1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____	3. _____

How am I doing? (Rate your progress) 0 to 5 (0 - no progress, 5 - great progress!) _____

5

Week2. My goals for this week

List three things you will do this week that will stretch your English:	Say when you will do it.	Have you met your objectives this week? How? Please explain:
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.

How am I doing? (Rate your progress) 0 to 5 (0 - no progress, 5 - great progress!) _____

6

Week 12 - My personal goals for the course

Look back at your course objectives. Have you met them? How?:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

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Useful links

www.englishpage.com

http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish

http://esol.britishcouncil.org/

https://quizlet.com/join/JhSBpjSq2

https://www.perfect-english-grammar.com

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Appendix 3 – Goals questionnaire

Name_____ Date_____

Level _____

Did you use your personal goal book?

Yes/No (If NO, why not? (please explain))

_____

_____

_____

If yes, did you find it useful? Why/why not

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Did you find that writing your own goals motivated you to <u>study</u> more?

a. yes, I studied more in the weeks when I set goals
b. no, I didn't study more in the weeks when I set goals
c. no, I study a lot already and setting goals didn't motivate me to study more

Please explain (If YES, give examples, e.g. how much more time did you spend studying or practising English. If NO, please say why not)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Did you find that writing your own goals motivated you to <u>use</u> more English?

d. yes, I used English more in the weeks when I set goals
e. no, I didn't use English more in the weeks when I set goals
f. no, I use English a lot already and setting goals didn't motivate me to use it more

Please give explain, (If yes, give examples, e.g. how much more time did you spend using English by doing things that you didn't used to do or needed help doing?)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Did it make you think about how and when to use English? (e.g. did you actively think about how you were going to use English each day, did you focus on learning (what am I learning here?) did you actively create opportunities to use it? (e.g. talking with neighbour, friends, etc in English, watching TV, Youtube))

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Did you look forward to completing your goals every week or was it something you felt you had to do but didn't want to?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Did you have a routine of studying? E.g. did you study at the same time and on the same days every week or was it different every week? please explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Did you manage to achieve your goals each week? why? (what helped you) and if not, why not? (what stopped you)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Did you feel you were more <u>in charge</u> of your learning? If so, how? (please explain)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Did you manage to achieve your course goals? (why? why not?)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Do you feel that your English has improved as a result of creating your own learning goals?

Choose one of the following statements:

a. setting goals didn't make a difference and my English is more or less the same as it was at the beginning
b. setting goals made a difference and my English has improved because of goals
c. setting goals made a difference and my English is worse because of goals

(please explain)

_____
_____

_____
_____
_____

Would you have been doing these things if you hadn't been asked to write your goals? (if the teacher didn't ask you to write your goals, would you study and use English more outside of the class?)

Yes/No (If yes, give examples)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Did you achieve anything special/important to you or something that you're proud of as a result of writing it as a goal? Please tell us about it.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Did you use the WOOP (Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, Plan) strategy when setting your goals your goals?
Yes/No (If yes, give examples)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Any other comments?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank you