

The responsabilisation of citizenship language test preparation in the UK the promise of inclusion and reality of potential exclusion

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In 2013 ESOL classes were no longer sufficient to become a citizen. The remaining route to satisfying the requirement for British citizenship is via the LUK (Life in the UK) test. The majority of LUK test preparation centres have closed down due to concerns about 'bogus' test centres and access to English support has been devastated. Therefore, individuals must now prepare for the test away from institutional education settings and, through 'responsibilisation;' that is to say, they must take charge of their own learning in order to become a citizen with full rights and privileges that this status promises. This affects some more than others. This paper will demonstrate the ways in which such situations are negotiated in citizenship language testing when the preparation becomes a part of responsabilisation processes.

This paper is based on data from an ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) citizenship project between 2014 and 2016. The data was collected in two cities in London and Leicester. In all we interviewed more than 160 people and the second phase of the project was ethnographically informed in that I spent time with specific communities. We are currently in the process of writing up the project.

Faced with difficult socioeconomic situations, low levels of education, motherhood in some cases and a demanding test, test-takers engage under difficult circumstances. In some cases, they engage with the test in their native language and thus undermine the ideological orientation of the test and preparation. In other cases, the test proves to be highly exclusionary due to the multiple responsibilities of motherhood and lack of test preparation support.

Through the responsabilisation of citizenship language testing, the test promises inclusion and equality but in reality marginalises women in particular on grounds of class and for their non-European or English speaking backgrounds. We provide empirical evidence of the barriers that many women face and the consequences of responsabilisation which was enabled in the first place by the withdrawal of adequate access to English and now punishes most those who are most in need of such support.

The relevance of our research has recently come into sharper focus due to the criticism of Muslim women in the recent Casey Integration Review in the UK. Within this political context, the Government is criticizing those who were hardest hit by funding cuts and law changes. Part of becoming a participative citizen is access to equal rights and opportunities yet pathways to citizenship which are far more onerous for some than others.