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Editorial

A note from the editor

Welcome to another issue of Modern English Teacher, wherever you are. Our theme was chosen a few months ago and I am happy we went with it. There used to be a time when certain teachers loved technology and others loathed it. After the last twelve months many of us have been forced to adopt it and I am sure the vast majority have been pleasantly surprised as to what it can add to one's teaching. Over the same period, we have also been asked to be more conscious of our learners' well-being, their state of mind and their behaviour, all of which are linked. We have had several international students who have been forced to stay here longer than they would have expected and that has had an impact on how they perform both in the classroom and in assessments. They have not seen their families, had home-cooking, or touched base with friends for a long time. We also have many students residing here permanently but with family outside New Zealand who might be suffering from not only the medical events of the last year but also other life-threatening phenomena.

Coping with that plethora of emotions is, therefore, an important skill for learners and teachers to be aware of and to manage, which is one reason I placed our first article where it is. I believe one of the key attributes of a good teacher is empathy, that ability to get close to the wavelength each individual learner finds themselves on on any given day. I am constantly thinking about teaching my classes as much useful language as possible, developing their skills, and offering them insights into communicating more efficiently. At the same time, I want that learning process to be as smooth as possible. What causes some of the problems is the assessments which crop up so regularly. Many of them are formative so should be less stressful, but it remains hard for learners to differentiate between summative and formative – to them they are all tests and exams. Keeping a class on an even keel through an eighteen-week semester is a challenge but one we all enjoy – at least here in New Zealand we are teaching live classes and not still online!

I have been mulling over for a few months now why some of the simplest patterns of English are so hard to put into practice. By a pattern, I mean something like using the same tense in the answer as is used in the question. More often than not, this will help you in your choice of language. The answer to 'What are you doing this weekend?' will probably be close to correct if you think in terms of using the present continuous. It will be even closer to fluent if you leave out as many words as possible. So 'Going to the rugby' would be a nice, simple, and accurate reply. Another pattern would be to follow up your answer with your own question and again limit the words, so 'What about you?' fits the bill nicely.

Noticing the language is a huge part of learning as I realised a few weeks back when I was out hiking (walking) in the bush (countryside). As we passed another couple, the man asked, 'How's your day been so far?'. This is such perfectly intuitive use of the present perfect that I replied, 'Fine thanks, and you?', by which time he was getting out of earshot, but the conversation was nicely completed. As a language teacher I was also thinking how right he was to use that tense. The day was not over yet. When I got back to the motel, the manager correctly asked me 'How was your day?', intimating my day was over, and the evening was about to start.

As teachers, it is really useful to keep notes on these perfect examples of the cement which holds conversations together and to help our learners spot them and try to use them. In terms of pronunciation, the rules for pausing are fascinating in English. It has nothing to do with the number of words and everything to do with the number of ideas. Each group of words essentially conveys some information, that is then followed by a micro pause before the next chunk is added. Sometimes the chunk can be one word, a linker for example, like *but* or a time marker like *then*. This understanding of pausing helps learners speak more clearly but, probably more importantly, helps them listen. I will be trying more of this over the next few months, it works at any level and helps bridge the outside English-speaking world to the classroom. Which is what all of us are supposed to be doing! Wherever you are doing it, stay safe and enjoy reading this issue.

Robert McLarty

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Emotions in language teaching

Jack C Richards discusses the importance of understanding and managing emotions in the classroom and online.

Teaching and learning a second language are both emotionally charged activities. (Dornyei, 2005). Emotions can shape the way teachers teach and can influence learners' willingness to make use of what they have learned. Hence learning to teach involves not only mastering how to communicate subject matter to learners but also how to manage the emotional dimensions of teaching and learning.

In the language teaching literature, emotions have traditionally been viewed as examples of 'affective factors' - often viewed as something fuzzy, difficult to tease apart into its different dimensions, and difficult to research. They were often typically regarded as 'soft' and irrational in comparison to the 'hard', quantifiable and rational facts about second language learning and teaching that were the focus of much research attention from the 1970s. However, the so-called 'affective turn' in applied linguistics has prompted a re-examination of the role of emotions and other affective factors play in language learning and teaching and highlighted the importance of questions such as the following:

- What sort of emotions do language teachers and language learners experience?

- What circumstances prompt these emotions?

- How do they affect the processes of teaching and learning?

Emotions and the teacher

For teachers, the experience of teaching may involve both positive and negative emotions and include feelings they have about themselves, their colleagues, their learners, classroom activities, their teaching context and teaching resources, as well as their feelings about the benefits and rewards of teaching. Emotions can influence the teacher's decision-making and future choices and actions. For example, they can affect:

- the teacher's use of English when teaching English

- the teacher's interaction with students

- how she/he responds to unanticipated classroom incidents

- the rules and procedures the teacher makes use of for dealing with classroom management issues

- the extent to which she/he makes use of activities that address classroom climate, such as games, songs, personal stories and jokes

- their choice of colleagues to work with in activities, such as team teaching and peer observation.

- the kind of feedback the teacher provides

- a preference for group-based or individual teacher development activities, such as lesson planning and curriculum development

- the extent to which the teacher makes uses of activities that involve collaborative rather than competitive learning

- the extent to which the teacher considers emotional factors when teaching with commercial materials and resources

- the level of satisfaction the teacher derives from teaching.

What can be called 'emotional competence' refers to the ability of the teacher to develop and maintain an emotionally managed classroom, one where there is neither too much nor too little emotion on either the teacher or the students' part (Benesch, 2012; Madalinska-Michalak, 2015.) Neither teachers nor students are encouraged to display negative emotions such as anger, boredom, or anxiety. However, different contexts for teaching can create either favoring or disfavoring potentials for teaching and that influence the teacher's emotional experience of teaching (Tsang and Jiang, 2018). Favorable contexts include motivated students, small class size, good facilities, resources, and equipment, skilled and supportive administrators who are open to new ideas, innovation and enquiry, a collaborative school culture, good compensation, benefits, and a reward system for teaching. Disfavorable conditions that can lead to teacher stress and anxiety include large class size, poorly motivated students, emphasis on book learning, rote learning and test scores, lack of encouragement for innovation or creativity, poor compensation, benefits, and the wrong kind of reward system for teaching. In many situations, factors such as these create a negative emotional experience of teaching, preventing teachers from realizing their aspirational or ideal teacher identity and leading to feelings of frustration and disappointment or even anger.

> "Hence learning to teach involves not only mastering how to communicate subject matter to learners but also how to manage the emotional dimensions of teaching and learning."

For the teacher for whom English is a second or third language, to teach English can also create an emotional struggle for the teacher:

'I think my English proficiency is not good enough. I really want to do my best in every lesson. However, I often got irritated because I was not able to achieve my goals or meet the standard that I set before class. I always practiced my English lessons before the commencement of the class because I did not want to lose face before my students.'
(Cited in Teng, 2017: 214)

Limitations in the teacher's English or her/his professional knowledge may lead to feelings of anxiety, frustration and guilt, since they may be unable to answer students' questions and may be afraid of making mistakes in their English when they use English during a lesson. For some teachers, negative experiences of this kind may cause attempts to suppress or hide negative emotions.

Teaching as a source of positive emotions

Despite the frustrations and anxiety that teachers sometimes experience in teaching, for many people, teaching is a source of positive emotions and experiences and these sustain their interest in and passion for teaching throughout their careers. A student-teacher in Teng's study (2017: 129) commented:

'I think I have a sense of joy from being a teacher. I really hope I can do more as their teacher. I want to help them improve their test results, and I also want to be their friend. I want to take care of them and support them.'

Teaching as a source of positive emotions is seen in the answers a young teacher in Iran gives to the following question:

Why did you choose to be an English teacher?

'Because I have received a lot of help from good people around me, and I want to pay it forward. Helping people makes me feel wonderful and satisfied with my life, and teaching is the best way to do so. Another reason for me is that I never had many well-educated and skilled teachers so I value the good and inspirational ones I have. I want to be that inspiration for others, to be a passionate teacher.'

Part of the teacher's passion to achieve emotionally satisfying teaching is driven both by her/his desire to provide a better experience of teaching than she/he received as a student, as well as by the personal satisfaction teaching gives her/him. She/he also takes active steps

to manage and learn from negative experiences. Managing the emotional dimensions of teaching and learning depends both on the teacher's individual qualities, beliefs and experience as well as being aware of some of the options available to the teacher. Positive interactions with colleagues and the ESL professional community can also be a source of emotional strength and reinforcement, sustaining teachers' motivation and commitment to teaching. The absence of such positive emotions can lead to teacher burnout.

Effective teachers no doubt have many different ways of creating an emotionally supported class - one where there is a climate of collaboration and sharing and where the class see themselves as a learning community. In a study described by Méndez López (below) for example, learners gave several examples of strategies teachers used to manage the emotional climate of the class:

' *...in this class, we all participated … you cannot feel tension in the environment and everything just flows. This teacher made everyone participate without showing you up when you made a mistake.*'

'*When teachers tell me something good about my performance, I feel really happy and I was like that all day in my classes. You feel good and motivated … I feel like participating more because I know I am doing things right.*'
(Cited in Méndez López, 2011)

An important part of a teacher's work is creating conditions for students to experience positive emotions and be willing to relax and take risks – or as Borg puts it (2006: 23), 'an ability to communicate feely and to radiate positive feelings'.

One example of support for an emotionally supportive classroom climate is the teacher's use of humor. Senior (2011) examined the role humor plays in the establishment and maintenance of class cohesion. Teachers described a number of benefits that resulted from the appropriate use of humor during

teaching. It helped students relax and be more willing to take part in lessons, giving them greater confidence and increasing their motivation.

> # "Whereas classroom-based communication in English is stressful for many learners, sometimes making them unwilling to communicate, other contexts create less of an emotional challenge for learners."

Emotions and the language learner

For learners, emotions include feelings about themselves, about their teachers, about other students, about using English in class, about the teachers' command of English, about the instructional methods and teaching resources the teacher makes use of, such as textbooks or the internet. Thus, one can compare the different emotions that arise in relation to activities such as these:

■ Using English with a native speaker versus using English with a non-native speaker

■ Taking part in group-based classroom activities rather than individual activities

■ Performing fluency activities rather than accuracy activities in a lesson

■ Performing a spoken activity in front of the class

■ Getting feedback from the teacher or from other learners

■ Getting feedback publicly or privately

■ Using English with classmates rather than on-line in a chat room.

Emotions have been described as the driving forces of motivation in second language learning (Dornyei, 2005). Positive emotions encourage curiosity, risk-taking, experimenting, willingness to interact and communicate in the new language, and support autonomous learning. They can motivate learners when they lead to feelings of success and achievement and enhance the learner's sense of self-esteem, encouraging them to invest further in learning and to make use of the range of learning opportunities available through the media or the internet or through opportunities to use their English out of class. In emotionally managed classrooms, teachers anticipate the emotions that language learning involves and look for ways of helping students cope with negative emotions when they arise.

Negative emotions can demotivate learners due to a sense of frustration and disappointment when learners fail to achieve their goals, losing confidence in their ability to succeed and discouraging them from investing further time and energy in language learning.

Learners can experience a range of negative emotions in classroom-based language learning. These include:

■ fear of being laughed at by their peers, of being negatively evaluated by teachers or of being embarrassed

■ concern that others in the class may be more proficient

■ hesitance to perform in front of peers

■ frustration at lack of vocabulary and grammar, perceived poor

pronunciation skills, or not being able to express what they wanted to say

■ concern that they misunderstood the teacher's instructions and explanations

■ confusion about how best to improve their English

■ boredom with the class textbook and learning resources or with the teacher's teaching style.

(Hashemi, 2011; Suleimenova, 2013; Méndez López, 2017)

The public setting of a language classroom also poses issues related to self-image, face and identity as seen in these learner comments:

'*When I speak to my teacher and ask some questions to my teacher, I usually feel very anxious. And when I [ask my teacher questions] in front of the class and speak some questions, I usually feel very anxious. I can't remember anything. I just "ah ah ah".*'
(Cited in Woodrow, 2012: 321)

While responses such as these may reflect individual characteristics that differ among learners (such as age, gender, personality, self-confidence and previous learning experience) some sources of anxiety may reflect cultural factors. For example, in some cultures, students may be more willing to communicate in front of their peers in the classroom than in other cultures. Studies of students in Iran have reported that an over-emphasis by the teacher on achieving a native-like (North American) use of grammar and pronunciation can cause anxiety among learners, who become discouraged and feel that they are not able to achieve the teacher's standard (Hashemi, 2011). Silence is another response to emotions such as embarrassment, frustration, annoyance or anxiety, which may be viewed by the teacher as a refusal to co-operate and is hence viewed negatively. However, for the learner, silence may be a way of managing emotions: it can serve as a face-saving strategy since others in the class can no longer judge the learners' language ability (Smith and King, 2018).

Whereas classroom-based communication in English is stressful for many learners, sometimes making them unwilling to communicate, other contexts create less of an emotional challenge for learners. Research on chat-room communication among learners suggests that it provides emotional support for speaking, since it is a stress-free context for the use of English. The participants are not handicapped by their limited English proficiency or by fear of making mistakes in front of their peers. Consequently, chat room interactions often result in more successful comprehension as well as a greater quantity of target language production than classroom-based communication (Jenks, 2010; Chik, 2014).

Hence teachers have to invest a considerable amount of emotional guidance to support learners' attempts to use English in the classroom. Méndez López (2017; 44) comments:

'Supporting students' emotions in language learning classrooms can help students to cope with feelings inherent to language learning experiences and to the development of a positive attitude towards themselves as language learners.'

Teacher-training textbooks and on-line sources offer a number of suggestions for teachers who seek to achieve an emotionally supportive classroom climate (Cavanagh, 2016: Hashemi, 2011). For example,

1. Introduce the notion of language anxiety and the role it plays in classroom-based learning

2. Help teachers recognize signs of negative emotions and supply strategies to respond to negative emotions

3. Emphasize the importance of an emotionally supportive classroom climate and how it can be developed

4. Encourage collaboration rather than competition among learners

5. Encourage students' attempts to use the language they have learned without undue concerns for grammatical or phonological accuracy

6. Focus more on formative assessment (assessment for learning) and feedback rather than summative assessment (assessment of learning) and feedback

7. Have students share learning experiences where emotions were involved, and how they responded to them

8. Make use of activities that students can enjoy and accomplish and which give feelings of success and satisfaction. For example, activities that:

    ■ enhance positive motivation

    ■ are not too difficult

    ■ have a demonstrable learning outcome

    ■ can be done in groups

    ■ are fun

    ■ give learners a sense of progress

Conclusion

The understanding and management of emotions are an important dimension of a teacher's knowledge and ability, while for learners, emotions are crucial to how they navigate and process their learning. In teacher education courses, teacher emotional awareness and competence can be the focus of procedures such as peer-observation, journal writing, critical-incident analysis, role plays, case studies and teacher narratives. For language learners, rather than being a hidden dimension of successful learning, emotions can be brought to the forefront through the use of activities that encourage learners to reflect on the role emotions play in their own language learning and in their responses to the emotional demands of learning and using English.

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Linking theory with practice

Douglas Bell discusses an alternative pedagogical approach to an MA TESOL programme.

Over the years, people have decided to work in English Language Teaching for a whole range of reasons. These days, it is highly likely that, eventually, most people who have committed themselves to a career in ELT will start to think about doing a Masters' programme, typically in TESOL or a closely related subject area such as Applied Linguistics. Indeed, in some parts of the world, these qualifications are now gradually becoming a pre-requisite for ELT employment and are thus fulfilling a gate-keeping function for entry to the profession. This stands in sharp contrast to the situation in the UK, where entry to these Masters programmes usually requires applicants to have a minimum of two- or three-years' prior teaching experience, (alongside a recognised initial teacher training qualification such as the CELTA or the Trinity College Cert TESOL).

While there can be little doubt that taking part in an MA TESOL programme will expose the participants to significant amounts of ELT theory, the learning that ultimately results from this may not always convert very well into ELT practice. This is particularly true for those who join a Masters' programme with limited previous teaching experience, especially if the programme itself lacks a practical teaching component. In such cases, unless students are encouraged to make their own explicit links between theory and practice, and the didactic transmission mode of delivery commonly found in university lectures may further conspire to make the gap even wider.

The benefits of only starting a Masters' programme after a certain level of practical experience and expertise has already been achieved are obvious. Such teachers have stood in front of a class of students and have taught the subject. They will therefore already be familiar with things like lesson planning, ELT materials and classroom management and thus have a practice-based contextual peg on which concepts that are more theoretical can later be hung. For those joining an MA TESOL programme as the first real step in their ELT career, the situation is clearly quite different. With little or no prior teaching experience, such individuals typically face a very steep learning curve, in which they not only have to get to grips with what can

often seem quite abstract theories and paradigms, but then also link these with strategies for classroom practice. This problem is often then compounded by the fact that many MA TESOL programmes do not include a practical teaching component, nor necessarily encourage their students to make *explicit* links between what the ELT research says and how this might then translate into what happens in the classroom. From my personal involvement in the delivery of MA TESOL programmes, often with quite experienced students, a very common complaint from participants is that even after having successfully passed their Masters, they sometimes fail to see the *practical* relevance of what they covered on the course or apply this learning

to their daily lived-in realities. In its extreme form, this is analogous to the English language learners who perform well in discrete-point grammar tests and can achieve high examination results, but then struggle to communicate when they find themselves in an English-speaking environment.

A further issue, which can serve to widen the gap between theory and practice, are the types of teaching and learning which typically prevail in Higher Education. 'Traditional' approaches to university-based teaching usually rely on the delivery of lectures and seminars, neither of which are necessarily conducive to active learning. This is particularly true when applied to vocational subjects, the mastery of which may ideally require a more hands-on, experiential element. The perceived shortcomings of the university lecture model have been well-documented in the recent academic literature (French and Kennedy 2017) with some writers proposing that lectures have long outlived their usefulness (Bates 2014) and others arguing that they should be got rid of all together (Clark 2014). While it is not necessarily my intention here to denigrate the value of lectures as an educational tool, it is worth considering how teaching and learning in university contexts has typically

been conceptualized, as this can also help to shine a light on the sometimes-fragmented relationship between theory and practice.

Drawing on some of the earlier work by Samuelowicz and Bain (2001; 1992), Eileen Carnell (2007) outlines seven different conceptions of teaching in Higher Education. These are summarised in the bullet-point list below:

■ imparting information

■ transmitting knowledge

■ facilitating learning

■ changing students' conceptions

■ supporting student learning

■ negotiating meaning

■ encouraging knowledge creation

As Carnell (ibid) explains, the first two items on this list are essentially quantitative in nature. According to these conceptualisations, the teacher is seen as central to the learning process and the emphasis is on instruction (information transfer). By contrast, the remaining five bullet-points are qualitative. Here, the teacher is seen as a facilitator of learning and the emphasis is placed on construction (information creation).

Under an information transfer model of teaching, learners tend to be passive recipients of knowledge. The teaching curriculum is fixed, the teacher is pivotal, the roles of learners and teachers are kept distinct from one another and critical thinking is not encouraged. However, when teaching is conceptualized as information *creation*, learners are encouraged to become individual sense-makers, the teaching itself emphasizes activity and collaboration, teachers and learners share the responsibility for teaching and learning, and the ensuing knowledge is co-constructed (Carnell and Lodge 2002; Watkins *et al* 2002; Chalmers and Fuller 1996).

If a core objective is to get students making stronger links between theory and practice, then it seems clear from the above that an information creation model of teaching is the approach most likely to work best. However, it is also clear that the traditional university lecture format owes more to information transfer. As a means of reconciling these different outcomes, might it therefore be time for a change?

The MA TESOL at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China (UNNC) is a 180-credit 12-month full-time programme of study consisting of six 20-credit taught modules (students take three core modules in Semester 1, then three elective modules in Semester 2) followed by a period of independent research, which culminates in the submission of a dissertation worth 60 credits. The structure and academic content of the MA TESOL at UNNC largely reflects the brother and sister programmes currently in operation at the University of Nottingham, UK and on the University of Nottingham Malaysia campus, although there are some slight variations to cater more explicitly for the local Chinese context, such as the inclusion of a specific module on teaching observation and practice. This latter module is particularly valuable at UNNC, as around half of the MA TESOL applicants admitted to the programme each year have little or no previous teaching experience. From the earliest

days of the programme's delivery, it was strongly felt by the course designers that without such an explicit practical component, the overall value of the MA for such participants would be significantly diminished.

In my role as the Course Director, and academic convener of several modules, I naturally have a major stake in the success and future direction of the programme. However, from my more personal perspective as a Professor of English Language Education, I also have an ongoing professional interest in how our MA TESOL students make sense of and ultimately apply the different kinds of learning to which they are exposed. Observing the progress of successive student cohorts, I have become increasingly aware of what I see as a considerable gap in their understanding of how to apply ELT theory to ELT practice. In recent years, this has prompted me to consider the delivery of our MA TESOL from wider pedagogical perspectives and to reflect on ways in which such a gap might be effectively bridged.

Having decided that there would be several benefits to making some of the links between theory and practice on the MA TESOL more explicit, I found myself pondering the following questions:

Could I find a way of delivering my input sessions which would:

1. Give students a **stronger purpose** for doing some background reading? i.e., they would need to use any knowledge they had gained immediately.

2. Have students **engaging with theoretical issues in practice?** i.e., rather than simply learning about theory passively, they would get to experience it first-hand for themselves.

3. Create ample opportunities for **authentic** interaction and peer learning? i.e., the reasons for interacting should be real and involve meaningful exchanges of information.

> **"If a core objective is to get students making stronger links between theory and practice, then it seems clear from the above that an information creation model of teaching is the approach most likely to work best."**

4. Allow for some **genuine** and **highly personalised** critical reflection and introspection? i.e., the subject for reflection should be related to the students' own lived-in experience; they themselves should have a personal stake in things.

One of the core modules I convene is called 'Developments in Language Teaching Methodology'. The purpose of this module is to provide students with an overview of the main methodological advances in ELT and in so doing raise their critical awareness of how successive methodologies have grappled with similar dichotomous challenges. Examples of this typically include an exploration of issues such as the role and purpose of L1 vs L2; whether classroom pedagogy should be teacher or student-centred; inductive vs deductive approaches to the teaching of grammar and how to balance the demands of student fluency vs student accuracy. Two of the 3-hour input sessions on this module deal specifically with Communicative Language Teaching and I decided that I would re-badge the

second one of these as Communicative Language Teaching *Applied*. As an experiment to see if I could make the links between ELT theories and practice more explicit, I also decided that I would depart from my usual PowerPoint slide-led interactive lecture format and instead try to come up with a pedagogical approach, which would allow me to engage more directly with the four questions outlined above.

As already mentioned, individual MA TESOL input sessions last for three consecutive hours. After reading through the material that I wanted my session on CLT to cover, I ultimately settled on a seven-stage model for delivery. This is detailed below:

1. Get the students thinking first about the nature of communication in general, then ask them to consider how this might manifest in the ELT classroom.

2. Provide the students with a theoretical model from the early days of CLT and invite their critical reflection and evaluation.

3. Expose the students to some practical exercises to help them make links between the theoretical model and what they might encounter in ELT practice.

4. Provide the students with a more recent theoretical model for CLT and as in Stage two, invite their critical reflection and evaluation.

5. Ask the students to compare and contrast the two different models of CLT and identify any similarities and differences.

6. Require the students to take part in an extended learning task which would itself be highly communicative, and which would inherently espouse some of the theoretical principles they had been considering (I would only draw the students' attention to this *after* the task had been completed)

7. Have the students critically reflect on their participation in the extended learning task and consider the extent to which this task, as a

potential ELT activity in its own right, conforms to the proposed theoretical models for CLT.

In **Stage 1**, one of the first questions I asked students to ponder was whether some activities might be considered more communicative than others. As an extension, I further asked the students whether they could identify any key principles, which might be used as criteria for measuring this. My intention was that this would pave the way for **Stage 2**, in which I would then invite them to consider some early theorising about CLT.

In an article dating back to the time when CLT was still relatively new, ELT stalwart Jeremy Harmer (1982: 166) had suggested that a key hallmark of communication is that the speaker/writer should genuinely want to say or write something, and that the listener/reader should genuinely want to listen to or read this. Expanding on this point, Harmer (ibid) further postulated that for an ELT activity to qualify as *truly* communicative, it should ideally meet five key criteria:

- Students must have a **desire** to communicate.

- There must be a **purpose** for communication.

- Attention will be on the **content** rather than the form.

- The teacher will **not intervene**.

- Materials will **not control or restrict** the language.

(Harmer 1982: 166, my emphasis)

As I have discovered on more than one occasion, there can sometimes be a danger of my MA students seeing things in very black and white terms, so I stressed at this point that they should resist the temptation to categorize CLT as 'good' and more traditional methodologies such as grammar translation as 'bad', and instead try to embrace the idea that teachers need to be discerning in their pedagogical approaches and choose whatever works best for a given situation. As indeed, Harmer had originally proposed:

The job of a syllabus or course designer is surely to work out an efficacious balance between non-communicative and communicative activities, and the many possibilities between these extremes…. (Harmer 1982: 168)

It was now time, **Stage 3**, to give the students some practical exercises, which would hopefully augment and consolidate the theoretical model they had just been considering. For this, I showed them a slide displaying a randomized selection of 15 typical ELT activities. This included items such as writing a letter to a pen friend; giving instructions on how to do something; reciting a jazz chant; playing a game; taking part in an interview; solving a problem and reading a magazine. I then asked the students to work together in pairs and position each of these activities on a horizontal cline stretching from non-communicative on the far left to highly communicative on the far right. After sharing their answers with the class as a whole and engaging in some open

> "On the one hand, I wanted the task to be a meaningful activity in and of itself and something that would deepen the students' understanding of the designated content."

discussion, the same pairs were then asked to consider if there was any way in which a patently non-communicative ELT activity such as a drill or jazz chant might be adapted, so that it would become communicative. This not only provided an opportunity for some creative thinking, but also further consolidated the students' understanding of the theoretical principles, which must be satisfied for an activity to have genuine communicative merit.

In **Stage 4**, I decided to move from the practical back to the theoretical and showed the students a more recent academic model, which also purports to summarize the underlying principles of CLT. For this, I turned to Dörnyei (2009) and Arnold, Dörnyei and Pugliese's writing on what they call the 'Principled Communicative Approach' (2015) and invited my students to critically evaluate the writers' eight stated principles:

1. The input should be meaning-focused and personally engaging.

2. The input should contain an early and explicit focus on declarative knowledge.

3. There should be controlled practice activities to promote automization.

4. The controlled practice activities should be as motivating and meaningful as possible.

5. There should be a balance struck between meaning-based activities and form-focused activities.

6. The input should include a focus on formulaic sequences.

7. Learners should receive extensive exposure to L2 input in order to cater to their implicit learning mechanisms. However, this should be scaffolded with pre-task activities.

8. Learners should be given lots of opportunity to participate in genuine L2 interaction.

The resulting discussion segued into **Stage 5**, in which I decided to provoke some controversy and critical thinking. Having now exposed the students to two separate theoretical models for CLT, I presented them with a critique of the

more recent model by Scott Thornbury (2016) and invited their consideration of whether the Principled Communicative Approach has told us anything about CLT that we did not already know. As part of a slide titled, 'Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose?' (The more things change, the more they stay the same?), I asked the students to consider whether any of the core principles reminded them of any other theoretical models that we had already covered in the module. The ensuing discussion on issues such as language acquisition vs language learning, Krashen's Monitor Hypothesis and the merits and defects of PPP served as good consolidation for material already learnt, whilst also reminding the students that the history of ELT can often present its practitioners with a very strong sense of déjà vu.

At this stage in proceedings, I was now about a third of the way through the 3-hour input session and after a short break, it was time to move on to what was arguably the most valuable part, **Stage 6:** the students' participation in my extended learning task.

When designing this task, my intention was to invoke the principles of loop input (Woodward 1986) and provide the students with an activity, which would simultaneously operate on two levels. On the one hand, I wanted the task to be a meaningful activity in and of itself and something that would deepen the students' understanding of the designated content. On a separate level though, I also wanted the task to be highly representative of the principles that we had been considering. I hoped that in taking part in an activity like this, my students would experience a deeper level of understanding. In other words, rather than *passively* learning about CLT theory, they themselves would be enacting and experiencing it. This linked back to the second question I had earlier pondered.

The task I had ultimately settled on to help me achieve these aims was a semi-formal debate. Given that we had spent most of the session up to now discussing different aspects of CLT, I decided that I would divide the students into teams and ask them to debate the

following motio**n: 'This house believes that CLT is not suitable for use in China and should be banned'**. As preparation for this debate, each team would be directed to pre-prepared folders in Moodle (institutionally we are very fortunate in that all classrooms are internet-ready, and students can easily access supplementary materials posted in the university VLE) which contained a broad selection of journal articles, blog discussions and book chapters arguing either FOR or AGAINST the proposed debate motion. Students were thus given an immediate purpose to guide their academic reading. This satisfied the challenge that I had set myself earlier when thinking about question one, as the students would now need to read and make sense of this material as a direct and immediate preparation for the arguments they would muster in the debate. It also met my criteria for question three, as in deciding which ideas to use and who would say what, the students would have a genuine reason for interacting with their peers.

In terms of the timing, I told the students that they would have about an hour in which to read the resources and then work in their teams to decide who would speak first and how the ensuing debate might most effectively be structured. In my instructions, I made it a clear pre-requisite

that all team-members had to contribute to the debate, but they could decide for themselves the order in which they would speak and how they might deal with any counterarguments. Beyond this, I offered no further guidance and left each team of students to their own devices. They were free to remain in the classroom while making their preparations, go to the library or even work from one of the campus coffee shops, but everyone had to be back in advance of the designated debate start-time.

While the students were busy getting themselves ready, I rearranged the classroom seating so that each team of students would face the other. I also set up a video camera so that there would be a recording of the proceedings, which we could later watch and learn from together.

I formally opened the debate by stating the house motion and then invited the supporting team of students to present their case. Beyond this, I reverted to the role of observer and deliberately had no other involvement than occasionally checking the video camera. Thanks to their pre-task reading, each team of students were able to draw on a series of examples to support their arguments and after some initial hesitations and false starts, it became evident that they were starting to take things quite seriously

and wanted to win points for their team. Indeed, once the arguments and counter arguments began to flow, some students had clearly started to personalise the activity, the task was no longer something contrived and artificial, but had become a genuine debate in which they were keen to express their own thoughts and opinions. Mindful of wanting to leave at least thirty minutes of the session for some critical reflection and a de-briefing, somewhat reluctantly, I stopped the debate after about half an hour, declaring a winning team based on my evaluation of the overall fluency, persuasiveness, and logic of their arguments.

> **"The job of a syllabus or course designer is surely to work out an efficacious balance between non-communicative and communicative activities, and the many possibilities between these extremes…."**

As soon as the debate had finished, I moved to the final stage of the session, **Stage 7**, the purpose of which was to have the students reflect on what they had just experienced and consider the debate task itself as an example of a potential CLT activity in action. I was somewhat surprised to find that until it was directly pointed out for them, most of the students had not in fact 'twigged' that this activity had been deliberately chosen to mirror some of the principles we had earlier been discussing about

CLT. Once their critical reflection started in earnest though, the students were soon able to identify that the debate had in fact conformed to all of Harmer's original CLT principles from 1982 but had violated several of the more recent tenets put forward by Arnold, Dörnyei and Pugliese (2015), such as the matter of teacher intervention, whether to include an explicit focus on language and the role of controlled practice. This provoked a lively discussion on the pros and cons of CLT's 'strong' and 'weak' forms and as they had literally been living some of these theories while they took part in the debate, students were now able to talk from first-hand experience on which approaches they personally felt would be most effective for English language learners and why.

While I am not about to claim that PowerPoint slides and lectures no longer feature in my repertoire for MA TESOL delivery, I remain convinced that my decision to try and make the links between theory and practice more explicit by doing something a little different to the pedagogical norm was valuable on several counts. The feedback from the students about the session was uniformly positive, with many of them commenting on how doing the pre-readings, discussing that content with their peers and then taking part in the debate had really made them think about how CLT is supposed to operate. While some remained sceptical about whether they would be able to apply a similar activity in their own ELT classrooms, given the logistical challenges with large class sizes and their need to follow a fairly rigid syllabus, each of the students agreed that the session on CLT Applied had been much more enjoyable and motivational for them than sitting through a 'standard' MA lecture. Happily, they also agreed, as I had originally hoped, that taking part in the session had made them think much more explicitly about the relationship between ELT theory and ELT practice.

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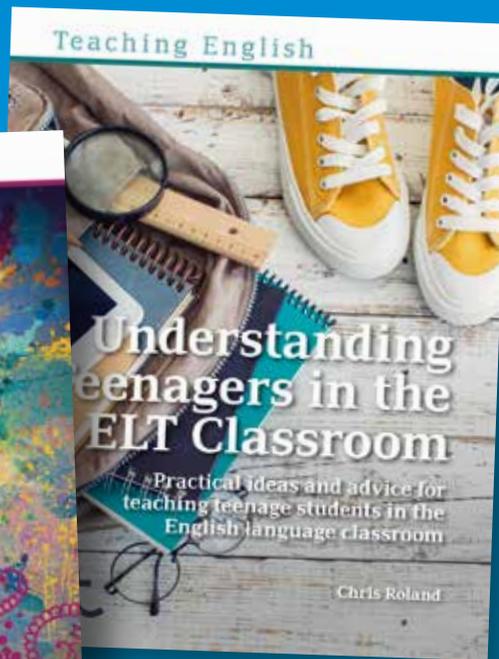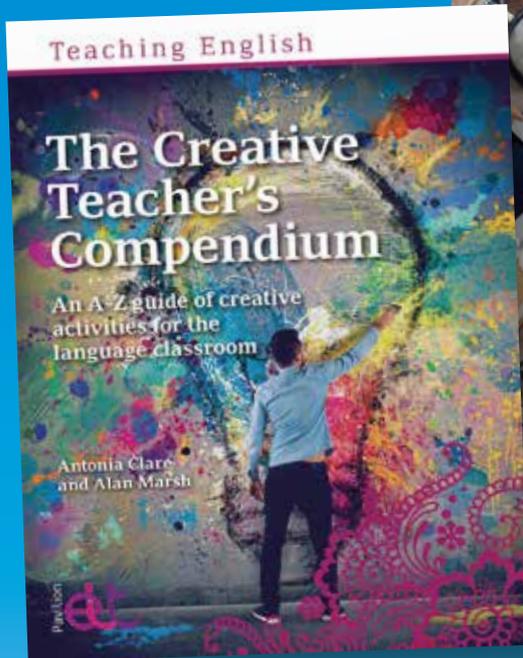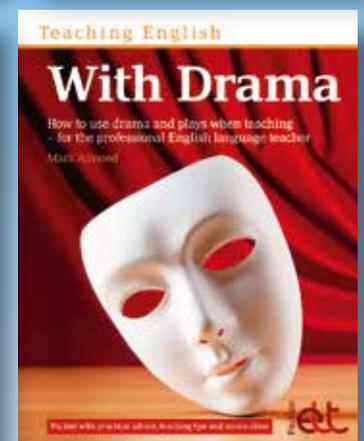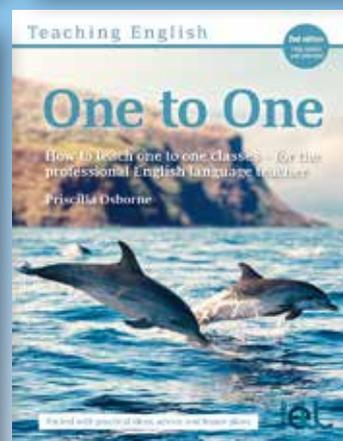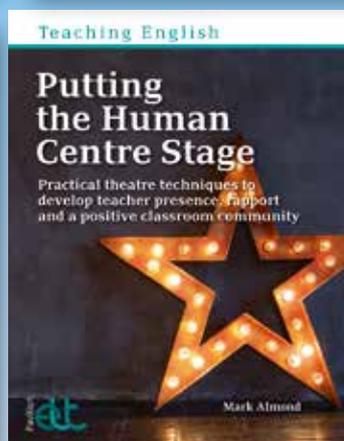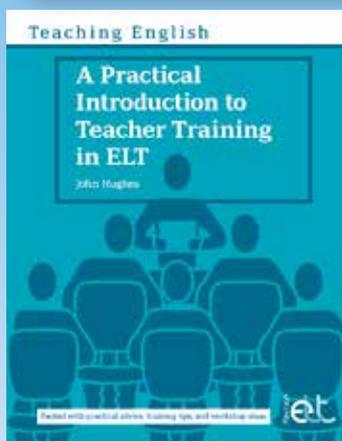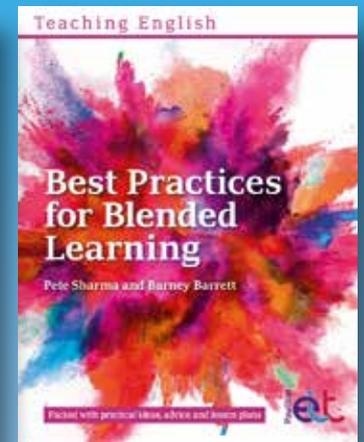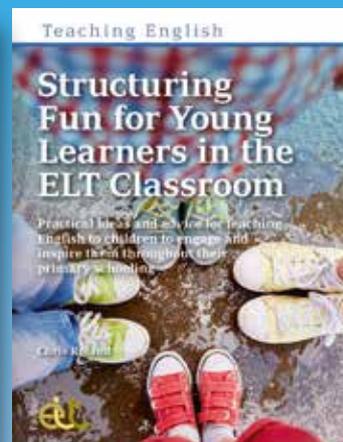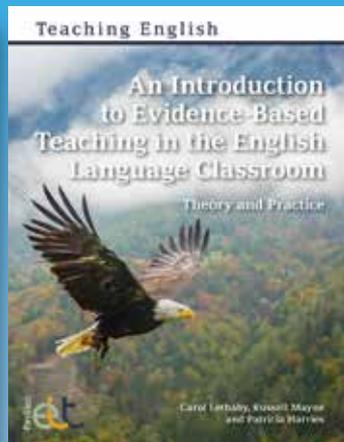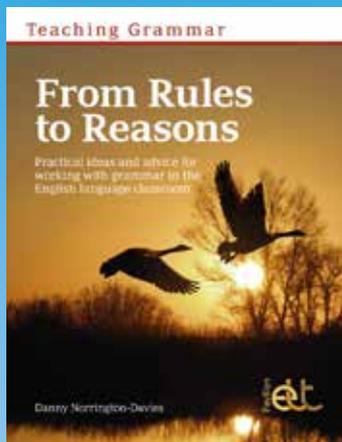
Technology and acceptance

Daniel Costa examines the relationships between users and technology.

The intricate nature and scope of technology have long been acknowledged and explored throughout the history of humanity. Plato and Democritus, for instance, posited that its function was merely to imitate nature, just as weavers learn from spiders building their nets; as opposed to Aristotle, who contended that technology could also bring to a finish what nature was unable to (Franssen *et al*, 2009). In this context, Aristotle distinguished between natural things – such as trees, birds and the four elements – and artifacts – such as tables and chairs – which are essentially dependent on human intervention and incapable of reproduction. Nowadays, it appears that human activities such as language teaching are heavily reliant on such artifacts, from more traditional ones such as chairs and tables to more modern ones that post-date the Ancient Greeks, such as computers, smartphones and tablets. The Oxford Learners' Dictionary defines technology as 'scientific knowledge used in practical ways in industry, for example in designing new machines' (Hornby *et al*, 2000). In 2020, owing to the global pandemic, the use of technology became, in many educational contexts, a necessity rather than a choice.

The Technology Acceptance Model

Our relationship with technology appears to be nuanced, still affected by personal experience and testimony, which are in turn conditioned by distinctive factors such as age, personality, cultural background, gender, education, wealth and resources. As a result, users from different personal and cultural contexts display differing stances with regard

> **"Understanding such a model can help us as educators pinpoint the difficulties our students may face when grappling with technological devices and advise them accordingly."**

to their acceptance of new tools and gadgets, which prompts varying degrees of motivation as far as language learning is concerned. A noteworthy model aiming to explore a user's acceptance and use of technology was introduced by Davis in 1989, based on the Ajzen and Fishbien model of Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which posited that behaviour is essentially determined by the intention to perform a given action, the social pressure on the users and their own attitude to the tool. Known as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Davis' model is based on the following five variables:

1. Perceived ease of use
2. Perceived usefulness
3. Attitude toward use
4. Intention to use
5. Actual use

Core variables

'Perceived ease of use' and 'perceived usefulness' stand out in this context and are thus considered core variables, the former referring to the degree to which the user would consider the tool free from effort and the latter referring to the degree to which it would enhance their performance (Davis, 1989). In the context of language education, 'perceived usefulness' is manifested in learners' willingness to use a web-conferencing tool such as Cisco Webex, a language learning application such as Duolingo, or computers altogether, based on their expectations of how this would enhance their skills. Similarly, educators are more likely to use tools that would enhance their teaching prowess and, consequently, the achievements of their learners.

Perceived ease of use is exemplified by a teacher or learner prioritizing a given website, application or web-conferencing tool primarily due to user-friendly features and familiarity with it, regardless of the benefits its use would yield. Needless to say, a golden mean should be sought. A user-friendly tool may fall short of the requirements to prepare a learner for a given exam, for instance, while an excellent yet inaccessible tool may hinder learner and teacher motivation altogether.

The two core variables 'perceived ease of use' and 'perceived usefulness', in turn, affect a third core variable which is the 'users' attitude toward use'. This
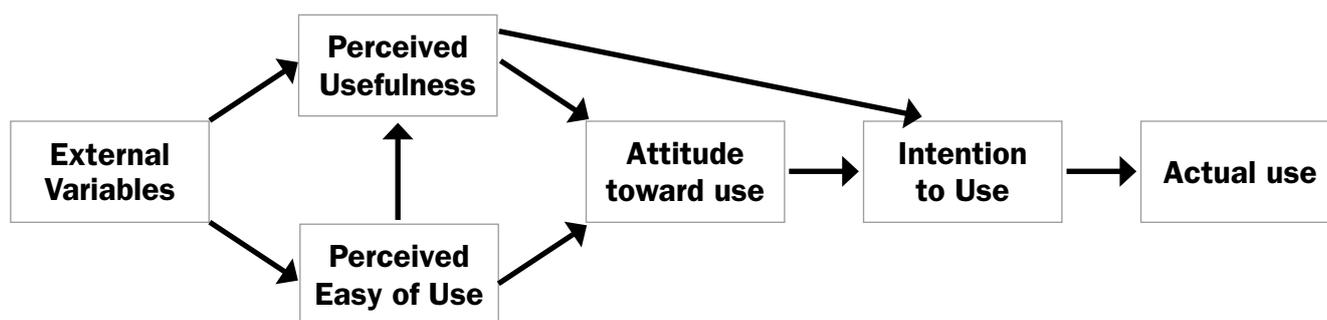
one disappeared in a later version of the model introduced by Venkatesh and Davis (1996), on the grounds that 'perceived usefulness' and 'ease of use' were found to have a direct impact on 'intention to use' and 'actual use'. On this account, 'attitude toward use' was dismissed as unnecessary.

External variables

The core variables of the model are essentially concerned with perceptions, which can be inaccurate and should thus be supported by solid evidence and adequate training in the field. In fact, Bagozzi, Davis and Warshaw (1992) state that attitudes towards intentions to use and usage may be ill-formed or devoid of conviction or may take place only after preliminary attempts to learn to use the technology evolve. In this context, faulty perceptions are likely to be prompted by external variables, as stated by Davis *et al*. (1989: 988):

'external variables provide the bridge between the internal beliefs, attitudes and intentions represented in TAM and the various individual differences, situational constraints and managerially controllable interventions impinging on behavior'.

In response to criticisms, further versions of the model have been put forward, underlining its flexibility in an everchanging world. The TAM 2, alluded to previously, excludes 'attitude'. On the other hand, it puts further emphasis on the impact of social influence on users' approach to technology. As such, it underlines the role played by **subjective norms**, namely social pressure on behalf of relatives and friends, as well as **facilitating conditions**, based on the contention that adequate infrastructure such as knowledge, technical support and organization, support the use of

technology. Another external variable to take into account is **computer self-efficacy**, or the belief in one's ability to successfully complete a task (Venkatesh and Davis, 1996). Research by Bandura & Wood (1989) suggests that high-efficacy users are more likely to succeed as they apparently work harder and longer than low-efficacy users. Gender has been given considerable attention too, prompting mixed results in different contexts, whilst prior experience has also been explored (Alfadda & Mahdi, 2021).

Outcome variables

At what point do educators or learners actually use the application or web-conferencing tool they need to achieve their pedagogic or linguistic goals? The fourth and fifth variables (intention to use, and actual use) are considered outcome variables, as they are essentially related to usage. As shown below, the core variables influence the teacher or learner's intention to make use of a given piece of technology, which in turn prompts actual use.

Understanding such a model can help us as educators pinpoint the difficulties our students may face when grappling with technological devices and advise them accordingly. It can also guide us towards making suitable choices to enhance our approach to language teaching. Further research is likely to shed light on the role, nature and scope of external variables which may affect users' approach to technology.

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Technology tips for three instructional contexts

Ekaterina Arshavskaya describes how she uses technology in her classes.

Today, most of us cannot imagine our life without technology in the classroom. In this piece, I would like to share several technological tools that can be simple yet effective additions to a language classroom.

Depending on the context, teachers adapt their pedagogical approaches. In a similar vein, we can use the same technological tools, but for different pedagogical purposes. While the following technological tools worked well in the contexts and the purposes I describe, there may be other ways teachers use the same tools in their classrooms. In this article, I will overview the following topics: online games for ELLs, tools for teaching international teaching assistants (ITAs), and collaboration tools for language pre-service teachers.

Online Games for ELLs

Free online games can be very helpful in creating additional opportunities to practise the language. They can also create a bonding experience for the teacher and students (Braunstein, 2020). Among the many options available today to language educators, I have been mostly using *Immigration Nation*, *3rd World Farmer* (Orsatti, 2021), and *Brightful.me* (Braunstein, 2020).

Immigration Nation is a web-based game that helps students practice several English skills (including listening, reading, and vocabulary) and is targeted towards beginner users of the language. The goal of this game is to learn about the ways people become citizens of the USA. It also features many educational resources around the topics of immigration, civil rights, U.S. history, and others. The game is offered in both English and Spanish.

In my classes, the game serves as a review of related vocabulary and materials that discuss the topic of immigration. One of the ways to incorporate the game in a beginner language class is to play the game together as a class. This offers many additional opportunities to use the target vocabulary (e.g., *to grant citizenship, to authorize, to deny entry*, etc.) and discuss game-related decisions as a class. For some of my students, this game is particularly relevant since they can relate to the topic as new immigrants in the country.

3rd World Farmer is a strategy game offered in several languages, including English, Portuguese, Chinese, and others. The goal of the game is to help a family of farmers to earn their living on a farm in a developing country. This game offers specialized vocabulary related to the world of farming and farmers' life. It can be played individually and/or together as a class through the screen sharing option in a video-conferencing platform.

In the ESL/EFL context, this game can facilitate additional vocabulary and speaking practice and serve as discussion

Image 1: A screen shot of *Immigration Nation* welcome page

Image 2: A screenshot of the *3rd World Farmer* start page

tool upon students' starting/completing a unit on economies of developed vs. developing countries, organic farming, and the role of agriculture in today's local and global economies. While some of the students may be more familiar with the topic due to their cultural or educational backgrounds and can offer interesting points to a discussion, other students may be attracted to the game itself. Apart from specialized vocabulary, the game offers both students and teachers a space to learn new information and to exchange opinions. The game can also serve as an experiential prompt in a writing class in which students reflect on their experience with the game in terms of, for example, new vocabulary learning.

Brightful.me contains several conversational games that target students' speaking, listening, and reading abilities and is designed for Intermediate and Advanced learners of English. It is offered in English.

Image 3: A screenshot of games in Brightful.me

In my classes, the game serves as an ice-breaking activity to help students collect their thoughts before starting the class and also learn about each other and myself (the teacher) in a more informal and collaborative environment. One of my favorite games in this platform is *Would you rather…* In this game, participants are offered two choices (e.g., Would you rather live at some moment in the past or in the future?) and they need to choose one option and rationalize their response. Usually, this game can provoke a lot of interesting and lively debates among students.

Tools for teaching ITAs

In my work with international teaching assistants (ITAs), I have found several interactive online teaching tools of particular use. The primary goal of my seminar for ITAs is to help them

practise teaching skills and therefore, applications that allow them to record and share teaching demonstrations are particularly useful in this context.

FlipGrid is a video-based discussion tool, and it allows students to comment on each other's videos through video responses. This tool can be used to facilitate discussions on a teaching-related topic, e.g., *Would you rather be a friend with your students or establish a more formal relationship? Why?* To help students practice more formal presentations, *GoReact* is a particularly useful tool since it allows educators to give students very elaborate, structured, and time-stamped feedback. In my classes, teaching assistants record short lessons via *GoReact* and receive constructive criticism from not only me but also each other.

EdPuzzle is another web-based tool, and it can be used to create interactive video-based quizzes to check student understanding of teaching-related concepts in the ITAs' teaching context. For example, you can 'annotate' a sample video lesson with questions asking ITAs to evaluate the quality of a certain lesson based on the criteria discussed in the course (e.g., clear lesson objectives, teacher-student rapport, etc.).

Collaboration tools for language pre-service teachers

In my online classes with pre-service language teachers, I utilize several tools to facilitate communication. First of all, students post their thoughts about assigned readings in the university LMS discussion board (in my case, this is *Canvas*). In this way, students feel more responsible for reading and understanding articles and as a result, come better prepared for in-class discussions. Second, I use *Google docs* to help pre-service teachers navigate their small-group discussions. The prompts I prepare and share via *Google docs* help students stay focused during their discussions. In addition, they can always go back to their notes in case they need to review the information at any point. Lastly, *Mentimeter* and other similar live-poll software allow

participating students to add their opinions to ongoing presentations with the use of their smartphones.

Conclusion

Overall, the use of technology in my classes has allowed to make them more engaging, collaborative, and effective for the students. Most of these tools can be adapted to different contexts and pedagogical purposes. I hope to see other educators' reviews of these or other instructional technologies to enhance learning environments for all students.

Some useful digital resources

Brightful.me. Ice-breaker games for meetings. Link: https://www.brightful.me/play/

EdPuzzle. Make any video your lesson. Link: https://edpuzzle.com/

FlipGrid. A video-based discussion tool. Link: https://info.flipgrid.com/

GoReact. Video software for skill development. Link: https://get.goreact.com/

Immigration Nation. An online civics game. Link: https://www.icivics.org/games/immigration-nation

Mentimeter. Interactive presentation software. Link: https://www.mentimeter.com/

3rd World Farmer. A thought-provoking simulation. Link: https://3rdworldfarmer.org/

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Technology both inside and outside the classroom

Kat Robb describes how learning is changing and recommends some of her favourite tools.

The effect of technology on language learning

The changing trends in the way we humans communicate and socially interact with each other has had a huge impact on how people approach education, and as McCarthy (2016) points out, 'there is some agreement that technology has changed the way people – especially young people – think and learn' (McCarthy, 2016: 1). The emergence of computer-assisted language learning (CALL), was game changing for language learning, and with the increase in computational power and the ubiquity of the internet, radical changes were made to the way teaching and learning could be delivered. Due to the availability of increasing amounts of free content on the web, emerging technologies, and the range of devices on the market, it becomes a challenge to know how to best implement educational technology and ensure that pedagogical goals are also met. I feel like Ed Tech has a true Marmite/Vegemite effect; oftentimes, teaching practitioners steer away from it through fear of not knowing how to best exploit it, or they go to the other end of the spectrum and prompt learners to use apps and quirky websites at every opportunity. As long as the learning objectives are met, I personally don't think it matters which side you fall on. Here I suggest some ways that I feel tech can be beneficial to learners both inside and outside the classroom.

In, out, shake it all about!

As we continue to dart around from A to B, we are speeding up the cogs of society and constantly seeking ways of saving time so we can fit even more into our 24-hour day. In this way, the term mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) was coined. 'As mobile technologies flourish around us, it's important to pause and ask ourselves: why should (or shouldn't) we be using these tools' for education?' (Pegrum, 2015: 24). Learning on the move or 'm-learning' is not actually that new but new devices with enhanced capabilities have dramatically increased the interest level. MALL has provided a convenient alternative to attending face-to-face language classes or studying at home, by taking advantage of time spent on mobile and smartphones engaged in other less cognitive activities and encouraging learners to take their learning outside the boundaries of the classroom by learning on the move. Here learners are creating their own user-generated learning contexts incorporating elements of the real world. MALL also offers the learner a

personal mobile learning option while inside the classroom, where mobile devices serve as personal computers and push aside the need for a computer cluster; 'what used to be phones with added-on computing capabilities have morphed into mini-computers which can also make phone calls' (Godwin-Jones, 2011: 2). In this way, computer assisted language learning (CALL) has morphed itself into a more modern-day and mobile version of itself; MALL. At the beginning of the twenty first century, Bax (2003) claimed 'CALL will reach this state when computers probably very different in shape and size from their current manifestations are used every day by language students and teachers as an integral part of every lesson like a pen or a book' (Bax, 2003: 24). The current trend of language learning with technology demonstrates clearly that Bax (2003) predicted correctly, and we are steadily on the path to the normalisation of technology in language learning where they 'become invisible, serving the needs of learners and integrated into every teachers' everyday practice' (Bax, 2003: 27).

A few of my favourite digital tools

Aside from the plethora of language learning apps that are available, there are other apps that are not language learning specific that can also be exploited with the same objective.

Padlet

Padlet is basically an interactive pin board that is web- and app-based. The settings can be private or open and creating a new board is quick and easy. I use Padlet both in class and outside the classroom, to gather ideas and collect work from students in an informal space that is open for peer review and if they are working in pairs/groups, can also be a collaborative space. It is a great place to pin the main points of a lesson and any accompanying documents which can be referred to by students who were unable to attend class or need to look back at what was covered, as a refresher. The standout feature for me

is the fact that it is a live collaborative document which does not require any private information to access it.

IM apps

Instant messaging apps work much in the same way as Padlet does, with the exception that learners are probably using WhatsApp, WeChat, Line, or Telegram anyway, so the familiarity appeals to them. Again, a group can be set up by the teacher or one of the students, to share ideas, information and documents, but also to work on collaborative activities both inside and outside the classroom. I have used both WhatsApp and WeChat, and the advantage of the latter is that users can join a group without sharing personal information. For me, it is a space where I can interact with learners informally regarding work I have set them and provide open feedback which can help everyone learn and develop. It also enables peer review which is useful for learners and prompts them to question the language choices their peers use. Activities I have set include watching a video clip and writing a 100-word summary which is later discussed in class. I also ask learners to read each others' summaries and comment in class which I have found helps build confidence among learners to question language and encourages peer feedback in addition to teacher feedback. Synonym races are another fun activity which I do at the beginning or end of a class as a warmer or a review. I type or say a word and in pairs/groups learners have to type in a synonym. Once all have been typed, the first group with the correct synonym wins a point. This is a great way for learners to be exposed to a wider lexical range, and also have a place online where they can access the lexis in their own time later should they wish to use the vocabulary.

Dictaphone apps

Perhaps my favourite Ed Tech tools are the dictaphone and voice recording apps because learners often express a keen desire to improve their speaking skills and attend lessons with this objective in mind. Having the courage to speak in front of unknown people is intimidating enough, add speaking in a

foreign language to the equation and it is perfectly understandable why many learners fear speaking in English. With the common trend of sending voice messages via IM apps to our friends and families one would hope we are used to hearing our own voices. Using a voice-recording app is a great way to practice pronunciation skills. For example, I ask my learners to read a short passage and record themselves. This serves as a record or logbook for them to listen back and see how they have progressed, in addition to being able to identify weaknesses in pronunciation that need to be worked on.

Ed Tech tools are rife, and I feel there is no do or don't as long as the pedagogical aims are clear and learning objectives are met. There is no doubt that technology is an integral part of our lives, and this includes low-resource contexts. So, if there is a way that Ed Tech can help promote learner interest and motivation and this helps learning to be more effective, then I think that can only be a good thing.

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Online and engaged

Beth Melia-Leigh and **Nicholas Northall** suggest five ways of increasing learner engagement in an online environment.

In the first of two articles, we describe five ways for making your online lessons more interactive and engaging. As most of us have been teaching online for some time now, this is a tried and tested collection of ideas for actively involving students in the learning process that we have found to work well. Just as in the in-person classroom, adding variety to our lessons ensures that our learners remain engaged and motivated to learn. Although you may find that a lot of the suggestions we make in these articles are activities that you have used many times in the in-person classroom, perhaps you have not yet tried them in an online environment. And if you have tried them using an online platform, did you find them effective and engaging? All of the activities which we describe can be used in almost any classroom with almost any kinds of learners.

1 Gap fills

Our first activity is an ELT classic: the gap fill, which essentially consists of giving learners a text with words missing. The missing words could be, say, every fifth word (word cloze) or words specifically chosen by the teacher for the learners to focus on (such as articles or prepositions). Both versions work well to encourage students to notice language and develop grammatical awareness.

For example, read the following text and complete the missing words:

> Gap fill activities are 1)___ good way 2)___ focusing learners' attention 3)____ specific language items. They work particularly well when there is only one option: so removing function words such 4)___prepositions or articles works well; however when the missing words are content words such as 5)___ or 6)___ the task becomes more 7)___.

Answers: 1) a; 2) of; 3) on; 4) as; 5) nouns; 6) verbs; 7) ambiguous

This task can be delivered in the main room (a good idea is to give the learners the aims of the lesson with some keywords missing) or as a pair/group task in the breakout rooms. As a twist on this classic task, why not get the learners in groups to create their own gap fills which they then share with another group?

A note on breakout rooms…

We thought we would add a quick aside here… If (when!) you use breakout rooms, a top tip is to ensure that your instructions for the task you want your learners to do are really, really clear. This could mean demonstrating or modelling the task, asking instruction checking questions or simply using clear and concise language (or better still, do all three!). If your learners do not know what to do when you put them into several breakout rooms, it can be rather difficult to first sweep monitor to check they are all on task – something we can easily do in a physical classroom. Another tip to ensure more learner involvement, especially with communicative tasks, is to give each learner a role such as note-taker, chatbox watcher, timekeeper and spokesperson. This means that each learner has something to do to ensure the task is successful.

2. Ranking

This is another in-person activity, which can be easily adapted to the online classroom. Essentially this task involves giving our learners a number of statements and asking them to rank them from the one they most agree with to the one they least agree with.

As an example, look at the four statements below and try to rank them about yourself (that is, from the one you feel most reflects how you feel

about online teaching to the one that doesn't reflect your feelings at all):

> A. I don't want to teach face-to-face ever again!
> B. I feel confident about teaching online.
> C. Once I am back in the physical class, I never want to teach online again!
> D. I still feel nervous about teaching online.

Give your learners some time to read the statements you have created for them, then ask them to put their order in the chat box. Consider nominating individual learners to give reasons for their ranking. If you want to get more from your learners, instead of asking them to share their ideas in the chat box, put them in breakout rooms to discuss their views and, possibly, agree on an order. You can stage this task as a pyramid discussion so that learners first decide on an order individually, then in pairs (in breakout rooms), then in larger groups (again in breakout rooms) and finally as a whole class (in the main room). At each interaction stage, the learners should justify their order.

The number and type of statements you give learners obviously depends on their ability as well as the focus of the lesson. You can also mix this up so learners rank the importance of items or the order of tasks: e.g. 'Put the following household appliances in order according to how useful they are' or 'What order do you do these activities in a typical day…?'.

This is a great way to get learners to give and justify their opinions. This task also practises functions of disagreeing and reaching consensus as well as a variety of language structures.

Now, look back at how you ranked the statements about teaching online or in-person. Why did you put them in this order?

3. Word games

There are many word games you can use in an online environment. Here are a couple of our favourites.

Missing vowels

For this activity, supply your students with some lesson-related vocabulary, but with the vowels removed. Their task is to work out what the words are. This is an interesting way to engage students' interest in the topic of the lesson, to gauge their current level of knowledge or to pre-teach or recycle lexical items. Here is an example of some topical language that could be introduced in this way, for example before a reading or listening lesson about Covid-19.

Once the students have guessed them all and you have checked understanding, you could then put them in breakout rooms to discuss predictions about what the text might be about based on the vocabulary.

Anagrams

Anagrams, or jumbled letters, is another word game, which is a little more cognitively challenging than the previous one. It is a great way to focus students' attention on the written form of language and can be used as a warmer, to introduce the topic of the lesson or to review previously introduced language. Start by displaying a number of anagrams on the screen and give learners some time to rearrange the letters. When setting up the activity, make it clear whether you want your students to attempt them one by one or in any order and whether they should post their answers in the chat box immediately or wait until they have them all (more on this in our second article). An example of some anagrams that could be used to recycle lexis to talk about the weather is shown in the figure 'Anagrams'.

If you want to make the activity more student-centred, it could be completed collaboratively in breakout rooms. Once the anagrams have been solved, the task could be extended in many ways, such as getting students to discuss what the weather is like in their country or their favourite/least favourite type of weather.

Missing vowels

The words on the right are all words that have been in the news a lot recently, but they have had their vowels removed. Can you guess what they are?
Put your answers in the chat box. You can answer in any order. You don't need to wait until you have all six.

1. crnvrs
2. lckdwn
3. slf slt
4. scl dstncng
5. vccn
6. msk

Answers: 1) coronavirus; 2) lockdown; 3) self-isolate; 4) social distancing; 5) vaccine; 6) mask

Anagrams

1. clod
2. airny
3. nusny
4. dywin
5. tho
6. wrwa
7. gofgy
8. dimuh
9. fezinger
10. bilgino

Rearrange the letters to make some words we can use to describe the weather.

Put your ideas in the chat box.

Answers: 1) cold; 2) rainy; 3) sunny; 4) windy; 5) hot; 6) warm; 7) foggy; 8) humid; 9) freezing; 10) boiling

4. Lectures

While long lectures in which students are passive recipients is probably not the best use of synchronous lesson time, a mini-lecture can be an effective way to provide learners with input during an online lesson. Keeping this relatively short ensures your learners' attention doesn't wander and providing them with a clear task to do while listening ensures they are actively involved. This could be a live listening with the lecture being read by you or a guest speaker or it could be pre-recorded. Listening to check predictions, note-taking or even T/F, multiple choice or comprehension questions are all valid tasks which provide a real purpose for listening. Just as you would in the face-to-face classroom, make sure that you give your students time to compare their answers together in breakout rooms before conducting whole group feedback in the main room.

A twist on this is to ask learners to prepare and then deliver their own mini-lectures, either in the main room or in groups. The speakers could also prepare questions or tasks for the listeners (something as simple as a 'name one thing you learnt from the talk') to ensure that all learners are actively involved.

5. Using the physical environment

Studying online from home provides a rich resource that can be exploited and used to enhance learning and bring online lessons to life. Making use of the physical environment adds variety, avoids screen fatigue and encourages movement, which is so important for both physical and mental wellbeing. A simple activity is to ask your students to look out of the window or around them and describe what they can see (or hear) to each other (e.g. 'A man is walking his dog' or 'It's raining'). This can be used to practise a variety of different structures and vocabulary (present continuous and weather-related vocabulary in the previous examples) and student-generated language is

inherently more motivating than that provided by the teacher. Another idea is to get students to go and get something, which they have to bring back and show to the class via their webcam. For example, 'Go and get an object which represents something you like doing in your free time' (e.g. a book or a football) or 'Go and get something you use in the kitchen' (e.g. a tea towel). Again, this is great for practising different language (for example, structures for talking about free-time activities, e.g. 'I love reading', or 'I play football twice a week'; or kitchen vocabulary, e.g. bowl, cup, knife, fork). It is also a nice way to personalise the lesson and to build a sense of community in the online environment.

> "If your learners do not know what to do when you put them into several breakout rooms, it can be rather difficult to first sweep monitor to check they are all on task – something we can easily do in a physical classroom."

Conclusion

We hope that you try at least one of the ideas that we have described with your current learners. Although we

have shown how these activities can be used with language learners, you may find that with some adaptation they can also be used in a teacher training/ education workshop or seminar. For a recorded example of how some of these techniques can be used in a webinar for teachers, see this video (https://event.webinarjam.com/login/gv7yysn1bq9h13t6sl) .

Please do let us know if you try these ideas and how your learners reacted. We would also like to know if you have any other ways of increasing learning interaction in the language classroom.

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Online materials – here to stay?

Luke Baxter discusses online materials from a publishing point of view.

I imagine the hearts of the parents amongst our readership will have sunk on reading this headline. I know that I for one, when the end of lockdown was announced, could not have got our little darlings out of the door any more quickly. Suffice to say that the contact with online materials in our household was not a happy one!

But so many of us – parents, teachers, children, students – are now familiar with online learning and materials in a way that a lot of us were not 18 months ago. This period has seen not only a massive increase in demand for content for online learning but also a far deeper critical engagement with this content. This has presented educational publishers with

the challenge to meet both the increased demand and the need to deliver content that meets the expectations of this more critical, discerning audience.

Meeting this challenge impacts me professionally because when I am not being a parent, I spend my day working as a digital publisher in ELT for Richmond – we are part of Santillana and our focus is on the Latin American markets. For this article, I spoke to my colleague, Jimena Lizalde, Richmond's Regional Product Manager, to get her take on the challenge from within the market.

In many ways what we have seen over the last 18 months in education can be seen as no more than a rapid acceleration of

a trend that was already well underway. We have been speaking about online learning and its associated changes in methodology, such as blended learning or the flipped classroom, for a number of years now. The digital classroom is hardly a novel concept but when we were faced with a situation where that was the only classroom available, how well have we coped? Lockdown will have thrown up questions for all the stakeholders in the educational process and in the case of publishers, will we need to ask whether our materials work as well in the digital classroom as they do in the traditional classroom.

The good news is that we do at least have a really significant data set to help

us answer this question. We have seen an enormous increase in the numbers of users accessing our platforms and in the amount of time they spend there – and this should allow us to get a better understanding of how online materials are used and what works and what doesn't.

Jimena described the situation as being, 'shocking, terrifying for teachers who found themselves in a situation where they had to change and adapt, no matter what'. Some markets, for example Colombia, have made the transition more quickly than others – we have seen 90% of teachers transition to a blended model in Colombia. Jimena describes Colombian teachers as being 'not afraid to make the digital transition almost overnight.'

Likewise, publishers had to change and adapt the content we were producing, and Jimena pointed out that at the beginning of the pandemic we were being reactive rather than proactive in providing content and tools for teachers. However, a year down the line, we have learned a lot of things that now allow us to make more informed decisions about how to adapt our materials for this changing environment.

Adapting Materials

Materials that can be used asynchronously, such as tests, workbooks or practice activities lend themselves readily to digitisation and online consumption and are arguably improved by this process. These are the types of materials that are mostly made up of activities with right or wrong answers, that can be corrected and scored by computers and these scores provide good solid data that feeds the markbook that allows teachers to be able to track their students' progress.

The great advantage of online digital learning is that it can give teachers good solid data about their students. This needs to be understood and exploited sensibly of course. Online materials can take care of some of the marking for teachers. These materials should be welcomed by teachers as they are the materials that save teachers from facing a stack of workbook activities to correct on a Sunday evening.

At Richmond one of the most significant changes we have observed is an increased reliance on the markbook by teachers. With students at a distance, teachers cannot assess them in the way they would do in a classroom. But a good markbook really does help a teacher support their students. By being able to visualise data, teachers can identify not just which students are doing well and which ones are struggling, they can also see what areas of concern exist for individual students. This allows teachers to personalise their teaching so that they can encourage students to revise specific grammar points or vocabulary sets that they have performed poorly on.

> "Lockdown will have thrown up questions for all the stakeholders in the educational process and in the case of publishers, will we need to ask whether our materials work as well in the digital classroom as they do in the traditional classroom"

This kind of data also allows teachers to assess their own teaching, so that if they notice that the whole class has struggled with one of those grammar points or vocabulary sets, they could consider revisiting them and presenting them in a different way or in a different context.

Digital content doesn't just help with the assessment or the kind of binary, right or wrong, content that can be found in workbook-style activities. Students' work that is saved and shared online is far less ephemeral than scrappy bits of handwritten homework that get lost or 'eaten by the dog'. A digital portfolio gives a teacher a quantity of work that they can use for continuous assessment, which is a fairer and more accurate evaluation of a student's progress over time than a final exam.

While it is relatively simple to adapt a workbook to digital - workbooks are designed to be used by a student studying alone after all - it's the classroom materials that have proved more challenging to convert. And, speaking for myself at least, I have not yet seen any digital materials that have significantly improved on the paper students' book that we have been producing for years now.

As we can see from the example of Colombia, the 'blended model' has truly become a reality during this crisis and will surely embed further beyond the pandemic.

It is apparently apocryphal that 'crisis' in Chinese translates as 'danger and opportunity' but whether this is true or not, maybe we should see this moment of crisis as an opportunity to really grasp the nettle and create content that is at least readily adaptable for online, digital delivery for blended scenarios.

The online content that ELT publishers produce tends to be adaptations of existing print products for classrooms. There have been some attempts to produce content truly designed for blended learning but none that have had a significant impact.

Part of the problem that we as publishers face is that there is no one single blended scenario. There is no simple formula of how the time with the teacher and the time studying alone is divided up. It would be relatively easy to produce content if we knew that we were supplying content where the division is 20% time with a teacher

and 80% alone but there are, of course, many varieties of this division of time and added to that is the consideration of what 'time with a teacher' means, is it in a traditional classroom or online using a video conferencing tool or a combination of both?

However the blend divides up, publishers need to examine what stages of the teaching and learning process absolutely need a teacher to be present.

Staging and signposting has always been a key part of successful materials, and this would only increase in importance for this kind of content. They key is to allow teachers to easily navigate through it so that they can decide what to do in class and what to ask students to do outside class depending on the class time that is available to them.

This might be as simple as separating out steps in the instructions for activities so that they can be done with or without a partner in the classroom. So, a rubric that read:

Complete the sentences with a partner and discuss them.

Becomes

1. *Complete the sentences.*
2. *Discuss them with a partner.*

In that way, the student can successfully complete the activity alone and maybe do the second part at a different moment, when they are in the classroom or online with a partner to discuss with.

Online teaching has made teachers consider more carefully the stages of their teaching and identifying these clear stages in the learning process means that each one can be isolated and introduced as the teachers sees fit. In the example above, we can see the production stage can be done by the student alone, while the practice stage would work better when the teacher and students are in contact.

We should also consider using L1 for instructions for students when students will not have a teacher present to support
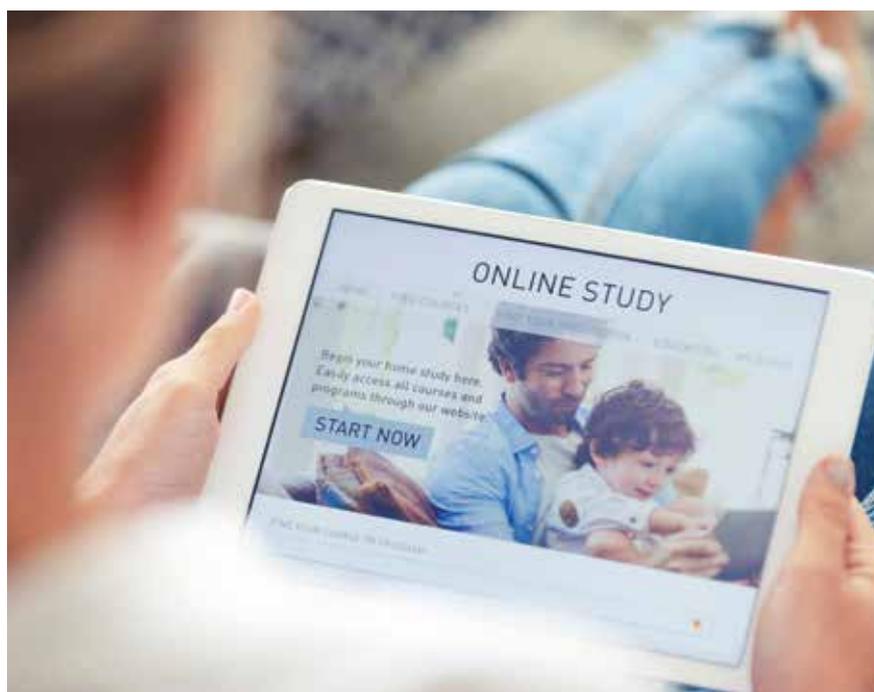
"And, speaking for myself at least, I have not yet seen any digital materials that have significantly improved on the paper students' book that we have been producing for years now."

them. We have all seen complex rubrics that use language that is well above the level of the student in printed materials. This was more or less acceptable when we knew there would be a teacher available to clarify what the students should be doing. But it does not seem really fair to expect A1 students to be able to do an activity like this one I found in one of our courses, that requires them to:

List the conservation measures in order of how effective they could be.

A teacher would be able to lead this kind of activity by showing the class what to do. A student working alone might well be at a loss.

We also need to consider that online content often comes with quite complex technical instructions, such as checking that your microphone is enabled or how to download and reupload documents, it really would be a considerable help to students to have these instructions in their own language so that they can focus on the language aim of the activity rather than worrying about what to do.

Most publishers now deliver their online content on some sort of platform that comes with an array of tools. To a certain extent, publishers are not just providing materials – we are providing a service.

One of the first demands from our institutions when the lockdown hit was that we should integrate video conferencing tools into our platform, so we are now offering connections to Teams, Zoom and Google Meet. These now sit alongside other tools for communications between teachers and students, like a forum and a messaging service.

Having these tools available allows us to develop content that is designed

website. This can be used to move online the kind of task where students would collaborate to work on a poster. A simple version of this kind of project would have a group of students working on a project on the United Kingdom with each student responsible for a country each. The students research the country, gather information, links, images and so on, which they post in the site. The end product would be a website that can be shared in the forum and like the posters on the classroom wall would be a visible record of the students' work.

Conclusion

Like it or not, online learning is here to stay, pandemic or no pandemic. As publishers we need to provide our teachers with content and ideas for how best to work in this changing environment. And just as teachers are having to adapt the way they teach; we will need to adapt the content that we provide them.

Our content will need to be flexible and clearly staged so that teachers can exploit it in a way that best suits their own teaching preferences and the situation that they are teaching in. We need to ensure that we give our teachers options for how they want to deliver our content so that they can adapt our courses to whatever scenario they find themselves in. This means providing content that works well both online and offline and supplying tools that makes this content readily accessible and easy to use.

to be used with these kinds of communication tools.

The forum is an excellent tool for practising collaborative process writing, where students can work together to gather together information and assets such as images or videos. They can then produce a number of drafts of the piece of writing and edit each other's work in order to hone it before sharing the final piece with the whole class. The process itself will give the teacher valuable information to help them assess their students' work.

Jimena shared an example of a process writing activity that she set up for a teacher training session that exploited a unit on food from one of our courses. The final piece of writing was to produce a recipe for 'Typical Food'. Each stage in the process, from brainstorming initial ideas, to drafting, to posting the final recipe, was detailed in the forum. Students were expected to collaborate on each stage.

And finally, as this kind of writing is online and visible to the whole class it becomes an authentic piece of communication in a way that a handwritten piece of homework simply isn't. We require our students to write 'Blog Posts' on a piece of paper but they are often only read by the teacher and the only feedback provided revolves around the student's use of English rather than the content of the blog post itself. How much more rewarding

> **"One of the first demands from our institutions when the lockdown hit was that we should integrate video conferencing tools into our platform, so we are now offering connections to Teams, Zoom and Google Meet."**

it would be for a student to not only get feedback on the correct use of countable and uncountable nouns in their recipe but also to have a fellow student comment how delicious the recipe looks and that they would be trying the recipe themselves.

Similarly, project work can be very successful if collaborative tools can be integrated or accessed via the platform. Google has a tool called Sites, which is essentially a wiki that creates a simple

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What's the point of rediscovering America?

Nick Michelioudakis looks at using commercials in class.

A definition of 'bland': I recently had to look up the word bland in a dictionary. Here are the top definitions: i) not having a strong taste or character; ii) lacking a strong or particular flavour; iii) anything found in an ELT coursebook... And because we are all conscientious, and we love our job and our students, we constantly try to do something about this - we try supplement our books by creating interesting, exciting, motivating resources for our lessons. But why? There are people out there who are paid a fortune for producing exactly this type of material. They are called advertisers. All we need to do is take the best advertisements (ads) we can find and use them in class. How can we do this? Here are four ideas:

Jigsaw viewing

Very often agencies prepare a number of ads for the same campaign. This is great for us language teachers of course because we can use these clips for split viewing. Here is how you do it:

i. divide the students into pairs (or groups - depending on the number of the advertisements)

ii. each student watches one of the ads on their mobile phone

iii. the students imagine they are advertisers working for the same agency and they have to describe their ad to the others (without showing them the video) and try to convince them that their idea is the best. This can lead to lots of talking and argument.

There are many series that you can use. Off the top of my head, I can think of 'Doritos (for the bold!)', 'Pepsi Max' or even 'Lynx' ads, if you fancy something naughtier… For me the best ads are short, a little weird and funny. These two De Lijn ads fit the bill perfectly:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMm21qax53g

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LApNDnhwj_Y

Continue the story

Many ads tell a story and there is a good reason why this is so; stories are engaging and memorable. The stories advertisers tend to prefer usually have three features: i) they are short; ii) they

consist of a number of scenes which we are often expected to string together 'filling the gaps ourselves' (which translates into greater engagement) and iii) they often have an unexpected ending (which makes it more likely they will be shared). For story-telling ads, the idea is to pause the clip at the right moment and then either:

i. Ask students to work in pairs and come up with three possible ways in which the story might continue, or

ii. Ask them to write a few sentences continuing the story. Then you play the rest of it and students can see how close they were. In this short clip ('Little Angels'), we have three such mini-stories. For the first one, you pause the clip at 0:27, for the second at 1:29 and for the third at 2:16. Have fun!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pxg_7W4flyc&t=60s

Memory games

While many ads are poor in language, they may be rich in other respects. For instance, there may be many objects in the sets, or there may be plenty of action in the video. In this case, you can simply ask your students to work in pairs and try to recall, for example, as many of the objects in the ad as they can, or what the various people are doing. If the various events are connected in some way, you can give students some prompts and ask them to recall the right sequence. Regardless of the nature of the task, students will be asked to put what they have seen into words (or phrases) which is often quite challenging. In the following excellent clip ('A bad day') we actually have a choice: we can ask students to recall as many of the phrases expressing frustration as they can, or, better still, to recall as many of the unfortunate accidents as possible. Has any of the following things have ever happened to you?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GS7mltej3pI

Listening

Naturally, for ads which contain language, there is no reason why we should not use the standard techniques that we all know and love, such as multiple-choice questions, sentence completion, etc. I assume you are all familiar with these, so I will not go on at length. I just want to make two points. First, the first task should focus on meaning. In most cases, it is the nature of the clip which suggests what the activity should be. For instance, in the clip below ('Morning Quickie!') the most natural first task is to ask students to make a note of the ingredients and the steps of the recipe. Second, it makes sense to have a second task which forces students to focus on the language in the clip. A gap-filling task is great for this, as it allows you to focus on the areas you feel your students might need most help with, for example, collocations, phrases etc. OK - time for a snack:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NxGlUEbOIBQ&t=2s

Where can I find this stuff?

Ads are ubiquitous. I am sure you have your own favourites. And so do your students: why not ask them? But I do realise that you are busy, so here is an idea: why not visit Nick's amazing channel on YouTube? There you can find lots of teacher-friendly ads under 'Ads for ELT'. And here is another thing: if an ad contains lots of language, Nick has (very thoughtfully) included a link in the description right under the clip. All you need to do is click on it and a Word document will pop up which you can use as it is or download it if you would like to change something. This worksheet contains one or two activities, plus the full script plus an answer key. And yes, the worksheet is free. Enjoy!

Nick Michelioudakis (B. Econ., Dip. RSA, MSc [TEFL]) has been active in ELT for many years as a teacher, examiner and teacher trainer and he has given presentations in numerous countries. He has written extensively on Methodology, though he is better known for his 'Psychology and ELT' articles in which he draws on insights from such disciplines as Marketing, Management and Social Psychology. For articles or worksheets of his, you can visit his blog at www.michelioudakis.org.

Technology to develop speaking in the new era of teaching

Robbie Lee Sabnani shares how teachers can use technology to develop speaking.

The digital realm offers a host of advantages for language learning. It allows quick access to resources and other scholastic references. Moreover, its seamless interface facilitates the engagement of learners at multiple levels to develop their capacities to use language and enhance their speaking competence. But why is speaking important? Well, it lays the foundation for literacy. For students, a strong spoken command of the language allows them to do well across curricular subjects, especially since thinking, explaining and rationalising is done primarily through the verbal mode (Goh & Burns, 2012). Speaking is important for school, as well as for communication at work, with colleagues and friends. Despite its significance, speaking is oftentimes a source of stress for many learners, due to the heavy demands it imposes on them to think fast on their feet and respond appropriately in exchanges taking place in real time.

The virtual tutorial session

Technology is indeed a great enabler of learning, but how can it be effectively used to enrich learners' verbal skills? This article shares some strategies to leverage its affordances to hone knowledge and skills for speaking. Consider the following virtual tutorial session: the session is designed for the first quarter of the class to be asynchronous, and the rest, synchronous.

> "For learners, the digital arena is an ideal platform to facilitate the development of speaking, because of their familiarity and the ease with which they can access information. For teachers, language learning apps can be skilfully employed to align lessons with learners' interests."

The format allows the learner to first study the relevant materials (such as lecture notes and resources) presented in the asynchronous segment to gain information about the topic. Making use

of the text, audiovisual and interactive features can significantly help learners in their preparation for speaking.

1. Asynchronous: providing input for speaking

The affordances of ICT platforms can be tapped to provide learners with input for speaking by activating their prior knowledge, eliciting their ideas and guiding their planning on the topic of discussion. This could include:

- Posting a related audiovisual clip
  - students preview the clip to activate prior knowledge
- Introduction of language related to the theme
  - students familiarise themselves with the vocabulary to guide their speaking

The express provision of input for speaking eases the cognitive load on learners so that they can focus on using the information to formulate their utterances (Goh & Burns, 2012). Sharing ideas and the appropriate linguistic resources allows learners to participate in interactions right away, which their limited repertoires might not have allowed them to do otherwise. Scaffolding is built into the lesson through thinking guides and short journal entry-prompts to direct learners' examination of how much they know about the topic and how they can incorporate the input

to convey meaning effectively. This systematic approach helps them in analysing the resources and enables critical reflection of their own mastery.

2. Synchronous: scaffolded practice to hone speaking skills

The support provided by the teacher helps learners go into the next part of the session with ideas, suggestions and observations about the topic they will be speaking on. The student-centred nature of the setting makes it an ideal environment for student motivation. Furthermore, students' active engagement in the lesson grants them greater autonomy over the learning process (Becker & Roos, 2016). Synchronous platforms such as forums and breakout rooms on Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, Zoom or Teams can be deployed to encourage practice.

The SEE structure, which is an acronym for *State-Elaborate-Explain* is a useful framework for learners to guide the structuring and presenting of their ideas. Students are helped to:

- *state* their viewpoints on the matters discussed, substantiating these with details including:
  - information on the speaker's view of the issues
  - contextual information on the place and time and manner

- *elaborate* on the experience
  - unpacking the who, what, where, when and how

- *explain* clearly the reasons why they had adopted such a stand

Students can be tasked to use the SEE structure to convey their responses to a visual prompt or an audiovisual stimulus embedded in the digital platform, for example, a simulated conversation or enacted scenario that they might themselves experience in their own school or personal lives. As they think together, they add value to one another's contributions. These carefully considered responses, guided by the SEE structure can help them interrogate their own knowledge to communicate their messages, and allow them to reap the benefits from practice.

The advantages of digital learning for speaking practice

Technology-enabled instruction offers many advantages. For learners, the digital arena is an ideal platform to facilitate the development of speaking, because of their familiarity and the ease with which they can access information. For teachers, language learning apps can be skilfully employed to align lessons with learners' interests. Incorporating games, quests and other interactional activities can make for more interesting lessons and encourage greater participation in tasks (Becker & Roos, 2016).

Implications for teaching and learning

Pairing technology use with directed instruction makes visible to learners the otherwise tacit areas of learning. For example, teachers' explicit guidance on evaluation of performance through the use of digital tools to elicit feedback at multiple levels or mapping learners' speaking against a set of descriptors. Teachers can signpost instruction as they invite learners to pose questions, explain their stands and offer constructive criticism. This deepened understanding enriches learners' capacities to reflect on what they know about the topic, and how they are to communicate the information accurately and fluently. Their abilities to examine their knowledge enables them to identify their limitations and thoughtfully consider approaches to bridge these gaps.

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Using graphic organizers for academic writing

Laura Hadwin describes how these tools can help develop cognitive skills.

Overall, academic writing simultaneously creates fascination and fear in English language learners, and I see it as part of my role to help demystify it, as well as encourage learner ownership, curiosity, confidence and pride. English language learners in my classes in British Columbia, Canada come from a variety of national, educational and professional backgrounds, which creates a very diverse learning environment. Like college instructors internationally, I am now teaching online and this brings new challenges, but it also provides opportunities for innovation and experimentation. Some of the graphic organizers I have selected were used in face-to-face instruction with whiteboards and/or pen and paper, while others had electronic versions, and I have also designed some with the purpose of using them for online teaching. With online learning a reality for the foreseeable future, and certainly not disappearing after a return to face-to-face teaching, I am eager to continue to explore how graphic organizers can be used online. Overall, I have found that online tasks require additional time to complete, and that sharing and providing feedback requires different strategies than in face-to-face learning. Learners have also said they find studying independently incredibly isolating and challenging, and that it is difficult to motivate themselves. My belief in the efficacy of graphic organizers to support learning is what initially led me to use them increasingly in online teaching and learning. I used them a considerable amount in the previous two terms online and want to continue to investigate additional strategies for implementation based on informal positive feedback I received from learners. I have selected five organizers that I have adapted and/ or created for online teaching and learning because they provide creative and active ways for learners to develop and demonstrate cognitive and academic writing skills.

Graphic organizers

'A graphic organizer is a visual and graphic display that depicts the relationships between facts, terms, and/ or ideas' (Strangman, Vue, Hal and Meyer 2004, p. 2). Graphic organizers are also referred to as cognitive organizers, knowledge maps, content webs, ideational frameworks, concept diagrams and concept, cognitive or semantic maps. Strangman, Vue, Hal and Meyer's extensive literature review (2004) found that graphic organizers improve reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and learning across all academic subjects and support many different learning outcomes.

Marzano *et al* (2001) identify 'Questions, Cues and Advance Organizers' as one of the nine most effective strategies for instruction. In his comprehensive meta-analyses of over 1200 educational studies, Hattie (2015) ranked 'Concept Maps' as twentieth of one hundred and ninety-five interventions for effective learning. As a learning intervention, their efficacy is significant. The effect-size was measured at .64 and anything above .6 is considered to have a large positive effect on learning (82). Research has also shown that graphic organizers are successful for developing English language learners writing skills (Hidayat 2017; Yavanni 2018). Servati (2012), in Kilickaya (2019) found that graphic organizers were a successful strategy to improve writing.

Graphic organizers serve as a learning enhancement and allow for differentiated learning.

They also support those with cognitive and learning barriers, as complex information is organized in a more accessible format (National Center on Universal Design for Learning 2013). They allow for collaboration and multiple perspectives and responses, and this is useful in open-ended tasks such as brainstorming. They also scaffold speaking and writing tasks, support pairwork and teamwork, encourage strategic and purposeful reading, promote critical thinking and higher order thinking skills, provide quick feedback on comprehension and can also facilitate gamification in learning.

Cognitive skills and writing strategies

Academic writing requires the ability to use language 'characterized by the specific linguistic features associated with the academic disciplines, but also higher-order thinking including conceptualising, inferring, inventing and testing' (Scarcella 2003, in Olson & Land 2007). There are many cognitive strategies associated with academic writing, and these include activating previous knowledge, evaluating, analysing, creating connections, self-monitoring and

"Overall, I have found that online tasks require additional time to complete, and that sharing and providing feedback requires different strategies than in face-to-face learning."

metacognition, and reflecting; and these are beneficial and often indispensable for strong academic writing (Olson 2011). Additionally, Bloom's Revised Taxonomy of Educational Objectives for the Cognitive Domain (Anderson *et al*. 2001) is frequently used in education and is a well-known framework for organizing cognitive skills. These cognitive objectives are generally classified into two groups: Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS), which include Remembering, Understanding and Applying, and Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), which include Analysing, Evaluating and Creating. This framework is useful because it is widely used, simple and flexible, and it allows both the learners and instructor to identify and reflect on the writing skills being developed. The skills also fit in well with various rhetorical modes of writing, such as expository, compare and/or contrast, discursive and cause and/or effect. The framework is not without its limitations, which include its hierarchal structure and the assumption that learning occurs in a linear manner with LOTS always acquired first and subsequent higher order skills developed afterwards. It is therefore not essential to deliver these graphic organizer activities based on their order in the taxonomy, although there is greater success with

higher order thinking skills when lower order skills are strong.

I have used the revised Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Anderson *et al*. 2001) to classify the graphic organizer academic writing activities. I have selected one graphic organizer for each area, but each of these organizers could be applied to different cognitive skills. By providing this framework and some of my favourite uses of graphic organizers, I hope other instructors will be inspired to adapt these to suit their unique teaching and learning contexts.

Remember/understand: mind maps

Mind maps are used for many pre-writing and brainstorming activities. There are many mind map designs to choose from, and learners can also be very creative and incorporate their own stylistic features. I use a variety of mind maps for specific vocabulary topics, such as the environment, globalization or business, and find that adding constraints such as categories with syllables (one, two, three, four, five and six plus syllables), the number of letters in a word (three, four, five, six, seven and eight plus letters) and word forms/lexical categories (noun, verb, adjective, adverb) are useful, and adding constraints has also proven to be effective in increasing creativity (Gibson 2010). Learners can be introduced to mind maps and complete them individually, in particular if their essays are on disparate topics. This term, to make the class more dynamic and encourage broader participation, I used the online whiteboard for vocabulary mind maps, and then addressed areas for language development as they emerged to make the lessons more learner centred.

Linking Words: An activity I used this term focuses on the rhetorical functions of linking words, and this language is relevant to the entire class. This includes words to indicate cause/effect, contrast, addition and time (Time and Addition for organizing ideas but also for expressing temporal relationships), and these linking words are essential for creating coherence and cohesion in writing. They serve to

organize the text, and also guide the reader through the writer's argument; however, language learners often struggle with these. I wrote the functions of the linking words at the top of our electronic whiteboard, gave learners a few minutes to brainstorm on the board, and after, we discussed, moved and edited the words. When using the electronic whiteboard in a whole-class activity, I find it more beneficial to have a linear and structured vocabulary map. In a face-to-face or small group learning environment, learners could be more creative and design freer mind maps. After, if they were completed on paper, the papers could be passed around or posted at stations with learners visiting stations to record new items and note points for questions and feedback. In the future, I would like learners to use graphic organizer websites to record and present the language; however, for many, adapting to the various online college platforms has been frustrating, and learning new software seems like an added burden. Learners were also required to provide the correct punctuation rules and provide examples of usage. An alternative method involving analyzing requires providing a list of all the linking words, and learners must put the words into the appropriate categories. To make this more challenging, the category heads/superordinates (Contrast, Addition, Cause/effect and Time) could be removed, and they must also identify those. This could be created as a word document, edited and then submitted or shared with the class. For an integrated-skills focus, the instructor could read the word aloud, and preferably in an example sentence, and learners identify the function and place it in the correct position on the organizer on a shared digital whiteboard.

Apply: attribute tables

Essay organization: This activity involves learners reading, identifying and then reorganizing an essay. I used essays written by previous students as models of strong essay writing. Prior to the switch to online learning, I created several laminated sets of an essay and then cut it into sections. Learners reorganized the essay and placed the sections into categories on a graphic organizer. The
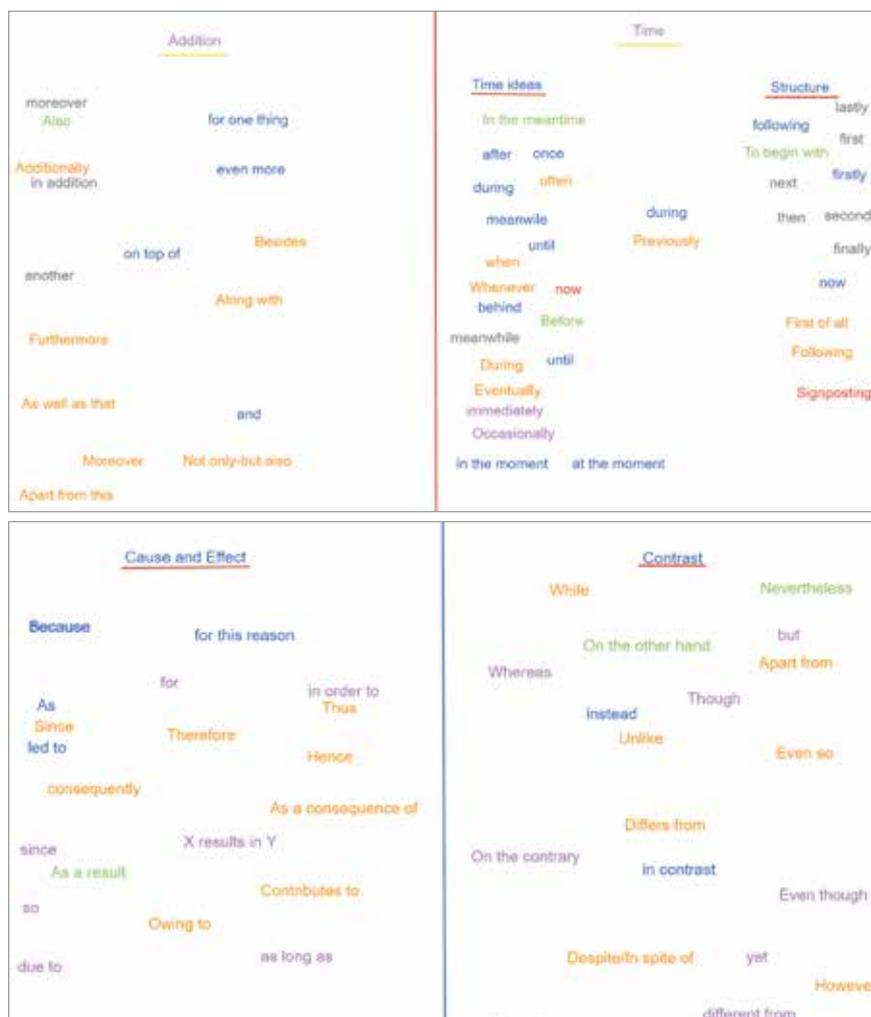
introduction is separated into the hook, general information and thesis, and each body paragraph is divided into three to five sections, which include the topic sentence, two or three supporting ideas and evidence, examples and/or counter evidence and rebuttals. The conclusion is separated into the summary and final thoughts. Each essay differs in how it is organized and subsequently separated, and I made sure that there were clues such as pronouns, logical arrangement of ideas and other cohesive language that led to the next point. For our online class, which lacks the same haptic ease of moving the laminated sections around on a table to explore different combinations, I also created a Word document and numbered each paragraph and assigned a letter to each section within the paragraph. In their online group study rooms, learners reorganized the essay, and later in the week, they explained why they reorganized the essay in the manner they did, and by asking focussed concept-

checking questions in the subsequent feedback session, I was able to identify areas for future development, namely increased reading for detail and greater emphasis on transition and sequencing language. They found it challenging, but they also liked the problem-solving/puzzle aspect of it, and once we had discussed it, it was clear why it had to be arranged in a very specific manner.

Strong reading skills are crucial for successful academic writing, and this activity requires learners to focus on context clues. It also requires considerable attention to detail, and when we are constantly switching between screens and skimming information, this is often sacrificed. Although mastery is an appropriate goal, simply providing models of exemplary writing does not actively engage learners. Reorganizing the text by identifying the parts of an essay requires a much deeper level of understanding and engagement.

Everyday and Academic Language

1. What is academic language? Try to define it and give examples.
2. Why is it important to use academic language?

Everyday Language	Academic Language
Lots	
Hand in	
Hand out	
Let and Don't let	
Like (example)	
Especially	
Look at/into	
Think/feel	
Make	
Show	
Make smaller in number	
Good	
Bad	
Thing	
Look into	
Do	
Say	
Think about/over	
Fight	
Get	
End	
New	
Old	
Talk about	
Find	
Fair	

Analyse: T charts

Academic and everyday language:
Having a clear idea of the difference between academic and everyday language is essential for strong academic writing, and T-chart activities can support this, with learners determining which category a lexical item belongs to. Prior to the activity, it is useful to discuss register and emphasize that language is complex, and better placed on a continuum with overly formal and archaic language at one end and slang at the other. In the middle, there are professional/academic and everyday language, and that depending on the context and the perspective of the user, there is variation. However, rather than viewing this as an obstacle, learners should be encouraged to see language offering great nuance and flexibility, and this is an area that can be developed and refined as they progress.

This activity requires producing the academic equivalents of everyday language. The left half of the T-chart is labelled 'Everyday Language' and everyday language such as phrasal verbs, simple verbs and overly general terms. Learners must then fill in the academic equivalents, and there are often several suitable possibilities. When I transferred this activity online, I modified the set-up and allowed ten minutes for everyone to individually look at the everyday language and think of the academic equivalents, and afterwards, we discussed the answers as a class. I have used this extensively in face-to-face learning, and because they are required to produce the language, group work allows learners to support one another and fill in gaps in lexical knowledge. However, as a result of online learning, I am beginning to reconsider my almost exclusive use of group work in class and reassess the value of individual work. Despite the obvious over-simplification of a binary/dichotomy, this activity nevertheless remains a useful awareness-raising activity, and often leads to an interesting discussion. This

is particularly helpful for learners who have strong communicative English but are unsure of academic language. A variation on this is where learners first identify the pairs from a mixed-up list and then place the everyday language in the left column and academic language in the right column. Returning and adding to this chart throughout the term allows for retrieval practice and spaced learning, two strategies proven effective for retention by cognitive science (Weinstein *et al*, 2018).

Evaluate: ranking ladders

Selecting academic sources: Selecting appropriate sources is a key academic writing skill, and with the abundance of both reliable and unreliable information on the internet, understandably many learners find it challenging to select suitable sources for their work. To scaffold this, the class were given one specific essay topic: 'What is the effect of eating disorders on teenage girls in Canada?' They had to use the college's library website to find suitable sources and post these in the discussion forum, using appropriate referencing. They also had to briefly explain why the sources they selected were relevant, reliable and recent. Last term, I used only this, but noticed learners still had considerable difficulty selecting and referencing appropriate sources, so this term I created an additional task with a new topic: 'What are the effects of video games on the physical health of young adolescents in Canada?' I included eight sources but only four of these were both relevant and recent. Because I was using the library website, the sources were reliable, which is the third factor we use in evaluation. I added a ranking ladder below this with five text boxes arranged vertically, so learners could copy the citations and see them presented clearly and accurately as they appear in a Works Cited/Reference list. In their groups, learners then ranked the sources on the ladder with brief notes justifying their decisions. This made the task more controlled and also led to more meaningful discussion because everyone had initially evaluated the same sources. When we met again the next class, each group screenshared and presented their ranking ladder and notes to the class,

and most groups found one or two new sources, and we discussed why they had not included the other sources. This process of negation can be very illuminating, and humorous particularly if a few of the sources are clearly unsuitable. There were four suitable sources, but it was also extra practice for them to find additional sources.

The graphic organizer also allows learners to feel more confident because it serves as a visual aid to support their speaking; however, its limited space for notes also prevents them from reading prepared scripts. This is a contextualized opportunity to practice accuracy with academic citation, and they wrote the additional sources using APA (American Psychological Association) referencing. When we went over the organizers in class, many interesting issues emerged, such as how to cite a source with more than one author or the difference between a report and a magazine. Because there were still so many citation issues, rather than correcting the organizers for them, I assigned groups to correct one another's and post the corrections in the discussion forum, and we went over these the next class, with each group taking on the role of the instructor and explaining their corrections. This greatly reduced teacher talk time, and also increased ownership, accountability and autonomy.

This task integrates reading and writing skills, which is more beneficial for learning as it requires a greater use of cognitive skills (Olson 2011). By further integrating listening and speaking, the class becomes more dynamic and participatory, and one of the frequent criticisms I have heard from learners about the limitations of online academic reading and writing classes is that they provide far fewer opportunities to develop listening and speaking skills. In contemporary education, digital and media literacy are a very important areas, and designing creative activities to strengthen critical thinking and evaluation serves our learners both inside and outside of the classroom. Requiring learners to select, evaluate and then explicitly outline why they have made the decisions creates a much deeper and more active learning experience.

Tabular Notes Template

Use this tabular notes template to help you organize your research. You need to fill in the table with the topics of your body paragraphs, the APA information for your sources as well as how you will use each source. You might only use one source in one paragraph or all three paragraphs. Each person's essay will be different. You need to present this to the class/your group.

	Body Paragraph 1	Body Paragraph 2	Body Paragraph 3
Source 1			
Source 2			
Source 3			
Source 4			
Source 5			

Create: matrices

Tabular notes: Tabular notes feature learners demonstrating how they will use their sources in their writing. The notes contain a matrix with the 'x' axis summarizing the topic of each the three body paragraphs and the 'y' axis identifying each of the three sources. The references should be written using the appropriate citation format. Learners write brief notes in each box outlining where, how and why each source fits into the paragraph. Some sources are used in multiple paragraphs and documenting it in this manner allows them to see how much citation is occurring in each paragraph. Learners finish the tabular notes, submit their first draft and present it to the class. This opportunity to share and learn from one another has been identified as important for success in developing academic writing (Olsen and Land 2007). Each learner had a maximum of five minutes to present it to the class, and this required them to prepare what they

wanted to say in advance. As we had a small class, each person screenshared and presented their tabular notes to the whole class, but if I have a larger class next term, I will visit each group in their study rooms, and they can present there. The class asked questions, and I asked guided questions and gave suggestions about referencing to each learner. This task allowed them to view their writing in a visual but non-paragraph manner using the organizer. I included it as part of the participation marks, but next term, I think I will make it five percent of the total essay mark.

Teaching strategies

When English instructors integrate cognitive skills into their lessons, over an extended period of time and in a variety of activities, it gives more opportunities for learners to acquire them, in particular as certain activities may resonate more strongly than others (Olson 2011; Olson & Land 2007). Olson & Land (2007 p. 273) also found that

English language learners are most successful when instructors 'have high expectations and do not deny access to challenging content' and the use of graphic organizers can help learners process and understand difficult material. They also found that 'when teachers explicitly teach and model the academic skills,' learning is stronger (273). I show learners examples of how I use graphic organizers for my writing and am in the process of collecting learner-created graphic organizers to share with future classes. I elicit and raise awareness about which skills are being developed with each graphic organizer and highlight that these skills are transferable and useful in many contexts. I am also using graphic organizers in a literature class and have employed similar strategies. I have created a graphic organizer rubric and provide oral and written feedback.

Academic writing skills take a considerable amount of time to develop and practising them in a variety of contexts is essential to their development, as well as to maintaining learner engagement. Successful transfer of academic writing skills is a challenge; however, if learners are given sufficient opportunity to also develop metacognitive strategies such as noticing and reflecting, they will be much more successful. Additionally,

with asynchronous online learning, learners have additional time to plan and reflect on their graphic organizers and writing. As an instructor, creating the materials, facilitating the learning, and then writing this article also developed my cognitive skills, in particular creativity and critical thinking. I look forward to using these activities with future learners and would be very interested to learn more about the graphic organizers instructors have successfully used in their classrooms.

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Using Zoom to create videos for professional development

Andrew Boon describes using Zoom to build a series of short clips.

Like many teachers around the world at the start of the pandemic (See Bertacco, 2020; Ellman, 2020; Hasper 2021), our faculty was asked to make the hasty transition to Emergency Remote teaching (ERT). We were told that the start of the new semester would be delayed from Mid-April to 1st May 2020 and were given time to familiarize ourselves with Microsoft Teams, the virtual platform we would use to provide our online lessons. At that time, I ran several live sessions via Zoom to discuss with colleagues the challenges that lay ahead and to help them become acquainted with some of the features that Microsoft Teams has to offer, namely, creating class teams, adding channels, uploading content, posting messages, and setting and grading assignments (One reason for using Zoom was that part-time teachers did not have their Teams accounts set up yet; another was a personal preference for using Zoom for video conferencing due to its more intuitive interface). However, as only a handful of teachers attended the live PD sessions, I wanted to develop a means of providing support to colleagues without adding to their already busy workloads. A possible solution was to use Zoom to record a series of bite-sized PD / training videos ranging from one to eighteen minutes in length featuring guidance on how to use the school's online navigation system, advice on how to use Teams, and tips for ERT via Teams (See Table 1). Once created, the videos were then uploaded

> **"It is also a means of documenting and sharing the PD initiative, so that fellow educators facing another challenging year of online teaching may make use of it to exchange with their colleagues or peers, knowledge, tips, ideas, advice, and examples of effective teaching practice for their online classes."**

to a dedicated Team for PD as well as sent to teachers as an attachment via the school's mailing list.

A year has passed, the new academic year has started, the pandemic continues, and many of us are still teaching online. As I started to plan the next round of PD sessions at my school, I wanted to take stock, consider what had been done, and obtain some feedback from my colleagues about the 2020 PD videos as well as the topics they would like to see covered in 2021. This short article explains how to create videos using Zoom, the types of PD videos I have made, and my colleagues' reactions to them. It is also a means of documenting and sharing the PD initiative, so that fellow educators facing another challenging year of online teaching may make use of it to exchange with their colleagues or peers, knowledge, tips, ideas, advice, and examples of effective teaching practice for their online classes.

How to make and upload videos

Zoom is not only an effective tool for live video conferencing but provides the user with an easy means to record content. When creating PD videos:

- I open a new Zoom meeting with myself as the only participant and select to join with my computer audio and video.

- I click on the green 'Share Screen' icon and choose the individual window I wish to share (e.g. Microsoft Teams or the website for the school's online

navigation system). I find choosing this option is better than sharing my entire desktop (I mean, who wants to see a desktop full of files and folders, right?).

- The individual window is surrounded by a green border to verify that this is the screen I am sharing.

- From the menu at the top of the screen, I click 'More…', locate the Record button, and click it to start recording. A red dot starts flashing on the 'You are screen sharing' message at the top of the screen. This lets me know I am recording.

- I start to narrate my videos whilst displaying the particular content I wish to discuss. If I wish to pause the recording, I can return to the Record button and click 'Pause Recording' and then click 'Resume Recording' when I am ready to restart the recording.

- Whilst recording, I can share new windows by clicking 'New Share' from the menu at the top of the screen.

- Once I have finished making my PD video, I end the Zoom meeting, and the recording will be converted to an mp4 file located in my Zoom folder on my computer. I then rename the file (e.g. Tips for Teams #1) and upload it to the general channel of the dedicated Team for PD for my colleagues to watch. In addition,
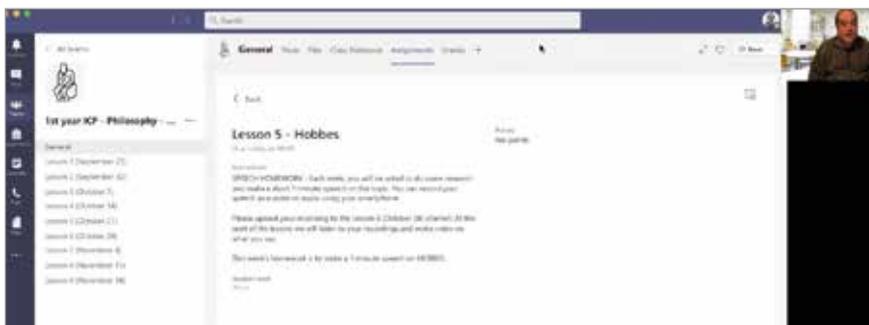
Photograph 1: Still from PD Video #10 (See Table 1)

I send it by email attachment via the school's mailing list.

Types of PD video

As mentioned, after the initial live Zoom PD sessions to get teachers up to speed on using Microsoft Teams, I switched to making short PD videos to provide ongoing support for my colleagues. At the time, I had no specific plan in place. Instead, I tended to make videos on the spur of the moment. Working from home without the need to fight my way through the Tokyo rush hour, I had time in the mornings to think to myself, 'Oh, this might be useful for my colleagues to know,' or 'That activity on Teams worked really well, I might share this,' and then quickly put a PD video together. As the 2020 academic year progressed, the focus changed from 'how-to' videos related to the functional usage of Teams and the school navigation system

(Videos 1–7 in the first semester) to sharing ideas for teaching resources and activities that had worked well in my classes (Videos 8–12 in the second semester). (See Table 1).

Faculty feedback

To obtain feedback about the 2020 PD initiative and determine topics to cover in 2021, I conducted a 3-question survey with my colleagues by sending them a link via the school mailing list to a 'Microsoft Form:'

1. Which do you think is most useful, attending a live Zoom PD session or watching a short PD video (or other suggestion)?

   Of the 13 teachers who replied, 9 indicated a preference for recorded videos, two for live sessions, and two for both.

Video number	Date	Length	Title
01	April 21	05.43	**Uploading video to Teams**
How to upload a welcome video created via QuickTime Player to a class Team / How to create a video using Zoom and upload it to a class Team.			
02	April 23	17:15	**Setting and returning assignments via Teams**
How to create assignments or quizzes via Teams; how students can return assignments or answer quizzes from the perspective of the student (the video was created with help from two volunteer students to show what they see on Teams when the teacher sets them an assignment).			
03	April 28	01.08	**Getting a link for a class Team**
How to get a link for a class Team to mail to students so they can join it.			
04	April 28	04.21	**A way to find out who has registered for your classes**
How to use the school navigation system to obtain a list of students who have registered for each class; how to send a message to students registered for the class.			
05	April 29	08.40	**Ideas for introduction lessons on Teams**
How to write task instructions in a lesson channel and to upload a teacher self-introduction pdf file; ideas for having students write a self-introduction, post it, and comment on their classmates' self-introductions; how to upload a teacher self-introduction audio file; ideas for having students record and upload their own self-introduction audio file; ideas for lesson 1 homework tasks.			
06	May 1	04.17	**Registering student attendance**
How to register student class attendance on the school's navigation system.			

Table 1: PD videos

2. What are your reasons for your answer to Question 1?

The preference for PD videos was due to their 'on-demand' nature. Recorded videos offered teachers the flexibility to watch them at a time of their own convenience (especially teachers with young children as live sessions were usually held from 7 pm to 8 pm), the ability to rewind and review parts if necessary, and to return to them at any time in the academic year.

With regards to live sessions, respondents mentioned the social aspect as being the main advantage. Respondents stated that they were useful to meet colleagues, discuss ideas, ask questions, and realize one is not alone with the 'struggle of online classes'.

3. What PD topics would you like to see covered this year?

Respondents requested videos on a variety of topics including how to use new features of Teams; introducing fun activities for reading and writing courses; using breakout rooms with large classes; encouraging more student interaction; giving effective feedback on assignments; creating on-demand content; and managing hybrid lessons.

Conclusion

This article has outlined a PD initiative to support teachers at my institution as we transitioned to online teaching during the pandemic. For me, the benefit of creating videos via Zoom was the relative ease and speed I could record and upload content to the dedicated PD Team from the comfort of my living room. For my colleagues, although live sessions were useful, PD videos could be watched and re-watched at a time convenient for the individual teacher. With this in mind, I look forward to making new video content for my colleagues as we meet the challenges of teaching in an ever-changing environment.

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	Date	Length	Title
07	May 20	03.54	**Assignments - allowing or not allowing late submissions**
	(Video requested by a colleague) How to schedule assignments, set due dates and times for assignments, allow or not allow late submissions by setting a close date and time for the assignment or leaving it open.		
08	Sept 15	06.44	**Using Quizlet for vocabulary study**
	Explanation of the New General Service List and how to use Quizlet flashcards in classes. (See http://www.newgeneralservicelist.org/ngsl-for-quizlet-soon)		
09	Oct 22	03.55	**Tips for Teams #1: presentations**
	Teaching activity: students create a narrated PowerPoint presentation for homework. The teacher uploads the files to the class Team lesson channel prior to the lesson. During class time, students watch each other's presentations and comment on them.		
10	Oct 28	03.08	**Tips for Teams #2: audio review homework**
	Teaching activity – students do research for homework on the philosopher they studied in class. They make a short one-minute audio recording about the philosopher, upload it to the following week's lesson channel; at the start of the new lesson, students listen to each other's recordings and take notes on them (see Boon, 2021).		
11	Oct 31	02.29	**Tips for Teams #3: vocabulary game**
	Teaching activity – students are given a word list in a task post in the lesson channel of a class Team, they are given time to study the words and look up their meanings, the teacher checks students are ready to play, types a definition for one of the words into the task post, and the first student to type the correct word gets one point. The teacher repeats with all the words, the teacher then announces the winner of the game using an appropriate 'winner' GIF to congratulate the student with the most points.		
12	Nov 3	02.29	**Tips for Teams #4: polls**
	Teaching activity – using the polls function in Teams to check whether students are keeping up with the online lesson; to negotiate lesson content or tasks; or to obtain students' opinions on a topic. (For more information, see – https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/add-a-poll-to-your-teams-channel-or-chat-a3f9112c-01e1-4ee4-bd88-25e4e243b80b)		

Table 1: PD videos (Continued)

Why write your own materials?

In the first of a series of articles **Katherine Bilsborough** looks at the reasons teachers write.

Most, if not all, teachers create some materials for their learners. This can be anything from a simple worksheet or a PowerPoint presentation to a full-length course with twenty modules. Sometimes we do this to replace existing materials that we feel are inadequate or lacking in some way. Other times we want to make supplementary materials to support the coursebook we are using, for extra practice that we think our learners need. Teachers often love this aspect of their work as it offers an opportunity to be creative while providing their learners with custom-made resources that are perfect for their needs.

However, most teachers have had little or no training in materials design. In a recent, informal poll I carried out on social media, I asked ELT teachers the following question: *English teachers who create some of your own materials: How much training have you had in making materials?* The options were: *1. None. I've taught myself. 2. Some (please add comments)*. I kept the poll open for 14 days and received 290 votes. Of these, 79% chose option 1 and 29% chose option 2. There were a lot of comments but what is clear is that of those who said they had received some training, for almost all, this was quite limited, such as a Materials Design module on an MA at best, or a few hours input on a CELTA course. Other comments included versions of, 'Mostly I learned by trial and error over the years', which, I believe, is that way that most teachers have developed their skills as materials writers.

This article, the first in a series of four, is written with these teachers in mind, to offer support, identify and address key areas that sometimes don't get a mention and to provide some practical tips to help teachers make their materials excellent in every sense. The next three articles look at: (2) What should teachers

keep in mind when they write materials? (3) How should teachers write their materials? And (4) Whose materials are they? Together, the four articles should provide a comprehensive overview of teachers as materials writers as well as practical advice.

Reasons for writing

Teachers are in an ideal place to create context-specific materials because nobody knows their learners better than them. They have an opportunity to tailor-make a worksheet that taps into learners' interests and lifestyles, focuses on key language areas that need extra work or address issues that are of personal interest. Other reasons include being able to use materials which are often absent from published materials such as contemporary issues, EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity) themes, eco-literacy and local context topics.

Contemporary issues

For obvious reasons authors are usually instructed by publishers to refrain from writing about anything that could quickly get out of date or irrelevant. One example that highlights this particularly well is the current Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers are unlikely to find many references to it in newly released coursebooks and while stock photo libraries have thousands of images of people wearing masks to go about their everyday business, ELT publishers aren't using them. The argument is of course that the books need to stand the test of time and to be as relevant a few years from now as they are today. If you create your own materials, you can address the most current of issues, bringing the 'here and now' into the classroom so as to be able to tap into learners' knowledge of what's going on in the world today, and how their own experience is linked to it all. You don't need to worry that your materials will date because you are going to use them immediately and it is this immediacy that will make them relevant and inspiring.

EDI themes

Over the past year or so we have been made increasingly aware of the importance of addressing issues

> "Teachers often love this aspect of their work as it offers an opportunity to be creative while providing their learners with custom-made resources that are perfect for their needs."

of equality, diversity and inclusivity in every context in the real world, in the spheres of business, the media, entertainment and culture, sport, politics and society. It should therefore come as no surprise that much is being done to make ELT materials more inclusive too. However, while some issues such as gender equality might be slowly finding their way into coursebooks, others such as LGBTQIA+ identities, racial equality and neurodiversity are lagging behind and show no sign of catching up any time soon. The main reason for this is that most publishers are afraid of upsetting their stakeholders. Ministries of Education in some countries will only approve materials that pass their vigorous censorship controls and ultimately a publisher's raison d'être is to sell as many books as possible and make a profit. If you create your own materials, you have more freedom to bring any issue into your materials. Of course, it goes without saying that this

should be done with sensitivity and with an understanding of what will be acceptable in your particular context. Make sure you get advice if you aren't sure how to go about creating materials with a focus on an area you aren't familiar with, ask for guidance from those who know more. It's great to make materials more diverse but it's also important to do it in the right way.

Eco-literacy

While 'the environment' has featured as a coursebook unit for decades, there is a growing understanding that there is a need for teachers to be developing their learners' eco-literacy skills in a more systematic way by making sustainability and the climate crisis much more present in lessons and in materials. The main reason for this is that the climate crisis is, for many, the most important global issue we are facing today. Therefore, as English teachers, we need to equip our learners with the language they need to be able to take part in discussions and debates with their peers. If you create your own materials, you can approach this topic in a more meaningful way, and without causing eco-anxiety – something that many teachers are rightfully concerned about. For ideas on how to introduce environmental issues into your materials effectively, join the ELT Footprint community on Facebook or visit www.eltfootprint.org.

Local context issues

Most coursebooks are produced for a global market or, if they are localized, for a large local area which isn't really 'local' at all, such as a whole country. While some topics might still be relevant in a broad sense for learners, they are highly unlikely to be focused on something happening just around the corner in our learners' worlds. If you create your own materials, you can have truly localized content, from the area in which your learners live and work. You can build language tasks around content such as street plans, restaurant menus, 'What's on' guides or photos of people and places that are familiar. In doing so, your lessons will become instantly more relevant.

Five practical tips on choosing topics that are engaging for your learners

The most important consideration when it comes to choosing a topic is the interests of the learners. All too often teachers assume that something they themselves find exciting or amusing will generate the same response in their learners. This is rarely the case because our learners come from a different place and in most cases their passions aren't the same as ours. The more engaging the topic is, the more of a connection the learners will feel so instead of making assumptions about interests, a good first step is to find out what your learners' interests are by asking them. While this might seem common sense, it's also something we rarely do. Building in this stage to our materials development can be done effectively in a number of ways and can form part of the learning process itself.

1. Two-stage discussion

Organise a two-stage discussion for your learners. Start off by drawing up a list of common themes that they come across in their English materials and encouraging them to say which ones are of interest and which ones they find boring. Then extend the discussion by asking learners to imagine they could design their own syllabus for English lessons and to suggest topics or language areas they would like to explore. Depending on the age and level of your learners, you could even ask them to provide authentic texts or images they'd like you to use as core content for materials.

2. CLIL/cross-curricular approach

If you are teaching young learners who are at school, consider a cross-curricular or CLIL approach. By developing materials that support subject matter from another area like art, history or science, you are supporting their learning in that subject too. Ideally teachers could collaborate across subjects in designing materials or integrated projects.

3. Needs analysis questionnaire

Write a needs analysis questionnaire to find out exactly what your learners will most benefit from learning. The questions you choose will depending on your learners' context, but open questions are best for getting maximum information. Adult students can be asked things like *What experience do you have of learning English? Who do you communicate in English with? How do you plan to use your English?* or *What do you find most challenging about learning English?* Younger learners can be asked about how they spend their free time or what kind of music or sport they like. Questions like this will help you get an idea of topics that will be of interest.

4. Writing task: areas of interest

Give learners a writing task, asking them to describe their areas of interest. This can be adapted according to age and level. The simplest form would be to provide five or six headings to write a couple of sentences about, *Things I like reading about*, *Things I can do well*, etc. More able learners could write a journal entry or a letter, using prompts to guide them into providing the information that you are looking for.

5. Ranking topics

Write a list of topics that you think your learners will be interested in and then find out which ones they find most appealing. This can be done in a number of ways, such as public class votes, through an anonymous poll or by asking learners to classify the topics from the most to the least interesting.

> "If you create your own materials, you can have truly localized content, from the area in which your learners live and work."

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The questions we ask

Irina Malinina takes a fresh look at listening/watching activities and reading comprehension.

When teachers design their own materials for various videos (on YouTube, for example) or texts (articles, short stories, interviews), it deserves credit. Such materials are usually based on important topics and recently published materials, which enable us and our learners to stay up-to-date as well as discuss hot topics and socially important issues.

Reading and watching/listening activities may include an entire array of different tasks, but tailor-made materials often consist, first and foremost, of a bulk of questions. Understandably, this is an easy way to cobble together a decent worksheet. But how justified is such an approach?

Let's delve deeper into the question.

What do we usually see in these worksheets? First of all, some pre-reading/pre-watching questions to raise schemata, then a few while-reading/while-watching activities and a set of post-reading/watching comprehension questions. Also, the usual set includes a *Match the Word and the Definition* activity, a *Fill-in the Gaps* activity, *Put the Statements from the Video into Sequence* as well as some questions for free speaking. Such worksheets, which teachers sell to peers, do not cost much and are quite affordable for most teachers. At the same time some of them often have one major deficiency, in my opinion: they are not always thoroughly thought-out.

It is true that sometimes we do not need to develop materials in a robust way if they are intended for our own students. We know them, we are aware of their range of interests, their language level, etc. Having said that, materials for a wider audience need to be made on a turnkey basis so that our colleagues can use them without extra explanations or huge additional development.

But what do we see in reality? We sometimes think that it is an easy task to come up with some questions related to the topic of the article or the video. But what is the value of such questions? Do they really stimulate discussion?

A colleague of mine, who has recently developed a series of materials, generously agreed to share her materials with me for a kind of 'audit' and to publish an overview of what can be improved. Many thanks to her for being up for feedback.

She has designed materials for an article about Barack Obama and the infamous video interview of Meghan Markle and Prince Harry.

This is what the Lead-in questions, which were aimed at raising the students' schemata and supposedly at invoking their interest towards the topics, looked like.

Article:

What do you know about American presidents?

Do you know anything about Obama?

Video interview:

What do you know about the Royal Family?

In my opinion these questions are too vague and ambiguous. If you try to answer them, it may prove to be an insurmountable task. When I hear such questions, I never know how to approach them. What do I know? I know something. Or I know nothing at all, and in this case, I won't say anything. So, I am not sure that such questions stimulate our students to think and motivate them to talk.

What can we offer for **pre-reading / pre-watching** activities instead?

Article:

Look at the list of facts about American presidents. Mark them *True* or *False*:

- George Washington was the first American president.

- Franklin D. Roosevelt was the longest serving president in US history, having served from 1933 to 1945.

- Barack Obama was the first African-American to be elected as the President.

- Barack Obama was awarded the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize, etc.

Video interview:

- Students make a list of the countries where monarchy still exists (alternatively, students may choose monarchies from a list of countries)

- The teacher hands out maps and asks students to mark the countries where monarchs still rule their countries.

- The teacher hands out the list of the countries and a few photos of royal families and asks students to match them.

- Students look at the list of monarchs and choose the oldest and the youngest alive.

- The teacher hands out pictures with symbolic things for the USA and Great Britain (for example, the Statue of Liberty, Buckingham palace, the White House, the Royal Family, etc) and asks the students to sort them into groups according to their country

- Students make a list of major historical differences between the US and Great Britain (monarchy/no monarchy; colonies/no colonies, etc.)

- To localize content the teacher can ask students to recall the history of their country – if it has ever been a monarchy or not. We can also ask students to think about their preferences: would they like their country to become a monarchy or not?

You may say that these critical thinking questions, involving classification and categorization, are primarily applicable for lessons with teenagers. Fair enough. As for adults, why wouldn't they just read and identify key/main ideas? Or watch the interview and make notes summarizing the key ideas? Making notes is a skill which many adults do not possess. We can ask some comprehension questions to channel their ideas and help them to come up with answers. For example: 'What was the major controversy about Obama's presidency according to the article? What were Meghan's major concerns about their life in London? Which situation described by Meghan caused Oprah's resentment? In general, how often are there conflicts between siblings and what can be the major reasons for them?' etc.

In the second part of the worksheets, we are analyzing here, I saw a list of questions among which were the following:

Article:

What do you know about John Kennedy?

Video interview:

What do you know about Margaret, Queen Elizabeth's sister?

What do you about Princess Diana?

Frankly, I don't think that modern teenagers or even young adults know or remember who these people were. It would make more sense **to offer them pictures and short texts outlining the life and death of these people**. This may evoke further questions, such as:

- Make a list of the pros and cons of popularity.

- Would you like to be popular?

- Why would anyone avoid popularity?

- What would you choose – to be rich and lack privacy or to be a lay person and lead the life you want?

Finally, when watching an interview, we often ask students how they think the interviewees feel during the conversation. Again, in my opinion this question is too vague. I would at least give the students a list of different feelings to help them use something more sophisticated than merely 'happy' or 'sad'.

We can also scaffold the post-watching discussion by giving students real comments made by the British about the conflict. This will help them to identify themselves with this or that point of view. For example, these comments may sound like this: 'The interview has caused a huge divide in our society, which does only harm', 'People are entitled to feel what they feel and not bottle it up', 'Britain has always been a melting pot of ethnicities, which some Brits obviously tend to forget these days', etc.

So, my main point is that questions should not exist for the sake of questions. Some of them are too wishy-washy and as such are boring. What we need to do instead is to facilitate discussions by various activities and orchestrate them through thought-provoking questions which act as 'yeast' for reading or watching activities.

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The case for exam moderation workshops

Jim Fuller argues for more teacher development around assessment literacy and shows how.

In nearly every language teaching conference one attends, or development programme run in academies and schools, you can find a plethora of workshops devoted to developing learners' understanding of and abilities to succeed at exams, be they high-stakes, external exams (e.g., Cambridge B2 First) or internal formative and/or summative exams. However, rarely are there workshops devoted to the development of teachers' understanding of exams, especially concerning exam marking moderation for criterion-referenced exams (with a few notable exceptions from the training teams for the various exams available). Rather, teachers are expected to know and understand intimately the exams they are preparing learners for with very little education regarding best practice – often the education they do have is experiential, i.e., learnt by doing. As seen in the previous issue of MET, Anthea Fester's (2021) research indicated that assessment practice sessions are in fact in demand and necessary, as teachers find assessment to be a challenging area. In this article, we will look at why exam moderation workshops should be an integral part of teacher development programmes as well as five workshop ideas on how to develop teachers' understanding of exams, marking schemes and overall assessment literacy.

What is exam moderation?

Perhaps it would be wise to clarify what is meant by exam moderation. Moderation in the traditional sense is when teachers come together and discuss the quality of a piece of work through the eyes of a set of criteria - and their interpretation of these criteria (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2013). These moderation sessions aim to ensure that teachers are interpreting the criteria in as similar fashion as possible (standardization), in essence, increasing the reliability of teachers' assessment skills. These sessions also allow for teachers to work together, express their opinions, doubts, etc. in a community of practice, effectively generating shared perspectives of the criteria (Crisp, 2018).

There are several types of moderation but I am advocating for 'consensus moderation' (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2013): moderation through individual assessing of work which is then followed up with a group analysis. This sociocultural approach encourages teachers to share their opinions, especially their disagreements, and to build new knowledge regarding the criteria in use as well as increasing the group's assessment capacity. The reason I think consensus moderation should be prioritised is that, as Allal and Mottier Lopez (2014) write, meaning is not the same for all individuals but through interactions, teachers can bridge the

differences with 'taken-as-shared' meanings, i.e., they work together to build an understanding of the criteria and how it is to be interpreted. Furthermore, by providing opportunities for less-experienced teachers to spend time discussing and examining pieces of work with more-experienced teachers, both examiner inter-reliability (scoring amongst teachers) and intra-reliability (the scoring of an individual teacher) can be increased, which has a whole range of positive effects such as higher exam pass rates, better-informed syllabus development, and higher learner motivation (Gardner *et al*, 2010).

What should be covered?

One might think that the best thing to do might be to get teachers together, choose a piece of work, assess and compare. That would not be far from the truth, however there are a number of areas in which teachers need to focus, and depending on this focus, the workshop will differ. So what do teachers need to focus on? Well, Klenowski and Wyatt-Smith (2013) suggest that teachers need to have sufficient *knowledge of the content* that needs to be assessed, *knowledge of the criteria* to be used in assessment, and evaluative skills developed through *experience in assessment*. What follows are some ideas

institutions may choose to include in their development programmes as well as some thoughts on how to carry them out.

Knowledge of the content

Teachers as learners

Most, if not all, teachers have marked their fair share of exam papers; however, how many teachers have completed one of the exams that they are marking? In developing teachers' awareness of exam content and requirements, they need to be placed in the learners' shoes, so to speak: they need to actually do parts of the assessment to really understand why learners would write something the way they do, or why they struggle with certain reading activities, etc. This also helps to build teacher empathy in the classroom, something which has been shown to positively affect learning (Meyers *et al*, 2019).

Start by introducing the tasks to teachers, and from here an analysis should follow. Here are some questions that aim to get teachers thinking:

- What does this task assess?

- What do learners find difficult?

- What are some common errors?

- What compensatory strategies do learners use?

- In what ways can the task be approached, i.e., how would a learner do this?

Once the analysis has been conducted, teachers then complete the task, preferably with the same time limit as learners. After finishing, teachers check their answers and revisit the task from a reflective standpoint. A few questions that could be asked include:

- In what way did you complete the task? Why?

- What did you find difficult? How did you overcome this?

- How do you think many learners feel during this type of task and how can we help better prepare them?

- What has this experience taught you?

The purpose of this activity is two-fold. First, by going through and completing the task, teachers will have a much clearer understanding of the requirements for success, and second, they will have put themselves in the position of the learner, and hopefully will have experienced some of the emotions learners may face and/or utilised any of the compensatory strategies they often teach in class and so will be able to evaluate their success.

Teachers as exam item writers for reading, listening and systems-focused tasks

In keeping with developing teachers' understanding of the content to be assessed, another workshop idea is for teachers to adopt the role of exam item writers. This is by no means an easy job, however through collaboration and guidance, teachers can truly develop an understanding of exam tasks, the content learners are expected to interact with, and how and why certain questions types might be easier or more difficult for learners.

The starting points for this workshop is an off-the-shelf task, i.e., something from a real exam. Take for example the Cambridge Flyers Reading and Writing, Part Three. In this task, learners are expected to complete a reading cloze using words provided (nouns, adjectives,

or verbs). They are then tasked with selecting an appropriate title for the text.

First, we need to provide the teachers with a 'complete' version of the text — no word or title choices. From here, teachers are then provided with the rubric and further details regarding the exam specifications (e.g., only certain word types can be removed). Teachers then work together to recreate the exam task with all the necessary elements. This activity has the added bonus of having a positive backwash effect of developing teachers' abilities at exploiting materials they have in their context.

Knowledge of the criteria used in assessment

'Teacher-ised' criteria
No matter how much detail goes into exam criteria, there is always room for interpretation, and teachers often find themselves uncertain of certain aspects, which in the end can lead to inaccurate use of the criteria (Green, 2014: 70). So, how can we combat this and try to increase inter-rater reliability? Teachers need to be familiarised with the criteria, which means seeing the criteria for themselves. From here, teachers should be encouraged to 'teacher-ise' it, i.e., make their own version that helps make the original criteria easily understandable and, in a word, usable.

In the Cambridge C1 Advanced, the speaking assessment criteria (grammatical resource, lexical resource, discourse management, pronunciation and interactive communication) are broken into five bands, with Band 3 constituting a pass at C1. These criteria are certainly detailed, however there is still room for interpretation. It can be useful for teachers to be tasked to work collaboratively to create their own checklist for a Band 3 pass in each of the areas, something they can take away and keep for reference later. An example checklist might be:

- Do they use both simple and complex structures?

- Do they use appropriate vocabulary to complete the tasks?

- Do they stop a lot while speaking?

- Do they link their ideas?

- Do they pronounce words clearly and are they intelligible?

- Do they interact naturally with their partner?

- Do they work with their partner to reach a decision?

> "This sociocultural approach encourages teachers to share their opinions, especially their disagreements, and to build new knowledge regarding the criteria in use as well as increasing the group's assessment capacity."

The creation of the list that can be taken away is certainly important but I would argue that it is the defining and interpretation of the criteria and questions that is more important. You see, when teachers work together to create checklists such as these, the inevitable question 'What does… actually mean?' comes up — and it is through this discussion that teachers can reach a shared understanding of the criteria.

Creation of model answers for writing and speaking exam tasks

Model answers are usually a *perfect* answer for an exam task

and are created by the educator or examination board (Newlyn, 2013). More often than not, many examination boards for current English language exams provide model answers either in their exam preparation coursebooks or in other official exam preparation materials. Many teachers use these model answers as a reference when marking, however, much like the completion of exam tasks, many teachers have little experience with creating their own model answer. One sure-fire way to ensure teachers take the time to interpret the criteria and get a feel for what constitutes 'top marks' is to have them construct their model answers for an exam question. Writing and speaking are the obvious choices here.

Checklist:
- Write 150 words or more
- Summarise information from chart
- Report the main features
- Make comparisons
- Write in correct register, style and tone
- Refer only to the data given, do not speculate
- Ensure that information is clear and coherent
- Use a range of appropriate linking devices
- Use vocabulary specific to the task
- Use a range of appropriate grammatical structures

Figure 1 Checklist for IELTS writing

This workshop is a logical follow-on from the introduction to the criteria. Teachers are once again presented with a set of criteria and an exam question; for example, take an IELTS Academic Writing Task 1, which requires candidates to write a summary of a graph or table. Teachers should then be given time to talk about the task, instructions and requirements, both with regard to the 'question' and the assessment criteria. It helps if teachers can create a checklist of what is needed (see Figure 1). Once teachers are fully primed for the task, they work together to create a model answer, which can then be compared to the model answered provided by the exam board, or alternatively, their answers can be marked by other teachers in the group.

Experience in assessment

Reassessing past submissions/ creation of exemplars

Exemplars are much like model answers, however these are learner-created. They are great for learners as they put a face to the name: they show an actual representation of the criteria at a certain level. They show learners what a low/mid/high-range submission is and why, and they highlight what it is that the examiner wants to see (Newlyn, 2013). But what about teachers? Most teachers probably have at least a couple of old exam submissions or recordings lying around, I know I certainly do. These old submissions, however, make for great use in standardisation workshops as they provide an insight into our idiosyncrasies with marking (e.g., 'Jim seems to mark learners more harshly for grammatical errors than for lexical errors') and, by working collaboratively, teachers can use these past submissions to find real examples of an agreed-upon standard.

Have teachers bring in several writing submissions or speaking recordings from previous exams (ensure that they are all for the same tasks). Provide teachers with time to discuss the criteria, as always, and then allow them time to reassess their own work. Once they have reassessed, ask teachers to 'submit' a low-range submission. Teachers then work in pairs or small groups to cross-mark these writings and justify why they are what they are. This can then be repeated for mid-range and high-range submissions.

From here, teachers then agree on which exemplars to use for each of the ranges. These can then be dissected, and the teachers can write the examiners comments, i.e., what are the positives, negatives, and why the learner got what they did. These can then be taken away and used both with learners as guides and with teachers as a reference for future marking.

The bottom line

At the end of the day, exams are part of language education and they are here to stay. With this in mind, we as teachers should thus know and

> **"Many teachers use these model answers as a reference when marking, however, much like the completion of exam tasks, many teachers have little experience with creating their own model answer."**

understand them extremely well — as a friend of mine used to say, '*these exams are our bread and butter, and learners expect us to know our stuff*'. Where does the responsibility lie with regard to exam education? Well, I would say with the institutions. That means the academies, schools, etc. that employ teachers. Yes, there are certain expectations of teachers but we in academic management need to lead by example and provide teachers with plenty of opportunities to develop their understanding of exams and the criteria used with them. Teacher motivation is something we often leave out of conversations — interestingly, however, two of the biggest *de-motivators* for teachers are a lack of self-efficacy and stress (Dörnyei, 2001). Therefore, expecting teachers to carry out assessment using criteria that they may not be comfortable using has negative effects for both learners and teachers. Providing workshops such as these seems a simple fix to a potentially large problem. Granted, this is certainly not an exhaustive list, and there are many other ideas, some most certainly more

appropriate to your teaching context. However, by providing teachers with these collaborative exam-focused opportunities, no matter the context, we are setting both them and our learners up for success when it comes to being prepared for and taking high-stakes exams.

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The power of community in ELT

Steve Tulk describes the importance of being around other people with shared goals and interests.

Community

Community is a well-used word, isn't it? There are community workers and community gardens. Some folk do community service and others run community events. There are online communities, open to all and closed communities which nobody can visit. We have community centres and community charges. And amongst all this we have the ELT community. Our community. Us.

And our beloved community has had a rough ride over the last year hasn't it? Haven't we, I should say. After all, we are the community. And there are very few of us who haven't been affected by the pandemic in some way or another.

For me, my day-to-day work has gone completely volte-face. Pre-Covid, I would be out and about in the ELT community, visiting language schools, universities and colleges, talking about materials, resources, syllabi and assessment. Obviously, that stopped. We stayed in touch by phone, by email, by Zoom and by SMS. Like the vast majority of you, my home became my world.

Isolation

Isolation is another well-used word at the moment – and it feels pretty much like the opposite of community, doesn't it? Working in isolation even more so.

In the good old days, we used to think of 'working in isolation' wistfully, with romantic ideas of the author writing alone in a wretched garret; the scientist taking ice samples in the Arctic; the young men bringing the sheep down from the mountain.

Alas, this is no longer what 'working in isolation' means to the majority of us.

Many of us live with partners and/or families. Some live with housemates, friends or pets. Others live very much alone. But whilst we may not all be living in isolation, many of us are definitely working in isolation. But what exactly are we isolated from? What are we missing? We see our students and our colleagues in online lessons and Zoom meetings, so what are we missing?

I asked Heledd Owen, ELT Teacher at CELT in Cardiff about this, and I think she hit the nail on the head. According to her, it's not the lessons and meetings that are missing – it's the bits in between. 'Now that we're all teaching online from our living rooms (or bedrooms!), the communal experience of the teacher's room is missing.' And for many teachers, this means missing out on not just friendship and socialising, but also on professional growth. As Heledd went on to say 'we have no one to turn to when we're looking for new ideas or different approaches.'

All cake, no jam

One way to discover new ideas and approaches has always been by attending ELT conferences and other events. When the world turned on its head and our laptops became our window on the world, much of the ELT world did a great job of keeping calm and carrying on. As lessons were moved online, so were our main social events. Conferences became webinars. TD sessions became webinars. Book launches became webinars. 'Meet the Author' events became webinars. Before we knew it, our LinkedIn feeds and our inboxes were full of invitations to the next big webinar.

Now this was a great move in so many ways – never before have we had access to such amazing input and development. Available 'live' or 'on-demand' on the screen in the corner of (insert name of room here – kitchen? Bedroom? Home office? Lounge? Hastily-rearranged-space-under-stairs?). All of the ELT greats were there, alongside new voices and faces, all of whom have been giving us much-welcomed ideas, motivation and inspiration.

But despite all of this solid-gold input, as we settled in for the first lockdown I felt something was still missing. All of these sessions were lovely chunks of cake. Sweet and interesting, brightening up our days. But the jam wasn't there. And the jam was what I was craving. But what was the jam?

To me, one of the joys of a good old-fashioned conference, book launch or other ELT event was the coffee break. The moment where we got to chat with new ELT colleagues and old friends about business, life and the conference session we had just been in. Where we got to share news and see what other schools were up to. Where we got to socialise, bond and enjoy each other's' company.

This was the jam that I was missing. And I had the feeling that I wasn't alone.

Rachael Roberts from life-resourceful.com is an ELT teacher and teacher trainer who has retrained as a wonderful psychotherapist and life coach, mostly serving the ELT community. When I asked her about this missing 'jam', she understood immediately. Rachael was very clear on the importance of being around other people from our community. Her view is that 'being with other people who "get" what we spend such a large part of our day focusing on can really help us to feel part of something' and she continued, pointing out that feeling part of something – in our case, the ELT community – has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety.

So, when working in isolation, not only are we missing out on spending informal time with our colleagues, but we are also losing our sense of being part of something bigger. And this has an adverse effect on our stress and anxiety levels.

After the first three months spent working from home, this was definitely true for me – and also true for many of the academic and school managers that I was in contact with. We were becoming lonely.

Lonely leaders

Now, school management – whether business or academic – has always been a lonely job. Unlike teachers, the School Manager, the Director of Studies, and the Academic Director are often the only one in the building doing that particular job. While our teachers can bounce ideas of each other and find inspiration within the team, being a school leader is largely a solitary pursuit.

ELT leaders have not only had to deal with the massive challenges that have been thrown up by a drop in student numbers and a shift to online/blended/hybrid lesson delivery, but they have also had to lead their institutions through the crisis. Not an easy job at all, but one that is helped in the UK by community groups like the regional DoSAs – the Director of Studies Associations.

Fiona Dunlop, Principal of Wimbledon School of English, talking about the role of ELT school leaders, told me, 'In roles like ours, our professional community can serve to support us - and offer solutions and opportunities for development, or just simple confirmation that what we are doing is right and that we are not alone.'

And indeed, DoSA meetings and ELT conferences have long been the places where school leaders could get together over coffee and do just this. But the pandemic pulled this rug away quite sharpish, didn't it? And so with less access to community support, this has been an incredibly tough, and lonesome, time for ELT leaders and managers.

Time for a change

By the end of the summer of 2020, I decided that something should be done about this lack of 'community space'. I set out to find a way to bring ELT folk together in a way that would be enriching both professionally and personally. Something that would be good for our professional 'wealth' and for our mental health.

With the help of colleagues at Macmillan Education, and some wonderful people at Quality English, English UK, LonDoSA and Learn English in Wales, I started to run some online ELT community sessions.

The initial plan was to have an hour-long webinar early in the week, followed by a discussion session based on the webinar at the end of the week. In reality, and having spoken to those who attended, it became clear that the interactive group sessions were considered much more valuable than the webinars. It seemed people didn't want to listen for an hour before chatting – they wanted to get straight to the chat!

And so the interactive community sessions were born.

Interactivity is the key

The set-up was simple – I organised different community groups (some in regions, others by affiliation to institutions, always sponsored by Macmillan) who would meet up once

a fortnight for an hour of discussion, debate and friendly chat. There was a theme for each session and a 'special guest' to manage the debate – themselves often members of the local ELT community.

Sometimes the guest would give a short presentation, but mostly we would meet online and chat about the topic 'du jour'. A wide range of topics has been covered so far – everything from 'hybrid classrooms' to 'delivering a British experience'; from 'teaching writing skills online' to 'encouraging collaboration in online classrooms'. We've talked about wellbeing, assessment, methodology and the future.

Nigel Paramor, Principal at English in Chester and organiser of many an English UK North conference was an early adopter of these sessions, along with his EIC colleagues. 'We found these sessions to be an invaluable way of networking and catching up with our local colleagues in this rapidly changing environment. It has been a great way of sharing good practice, but I also think that the community has provided much needed professional and emotional support to everyone who has participated.'

And that's the thing isn't it? We all feel better when we know there are others like us who are going through the same thing. And whilst we have all benefitted from the input of industry experts and ELT gurus in the wonderful webinars on offer, sometimes we just need to know how the folk down the road are getting on.

Community is good for us

Ultimately, the question needs to be asked – what comes from these community groups? What do people get from them? What have been the benefits?

When I approached attendees of the community sessions for feedback, this is what they told me:

- A large majority (85%) of those I spoke to said that the sessions helped them feel less isolated when working from home

- All of them said they had met new people from their region, or re-forged old connections

- Everyone felt they had learned something new or picked up new ideas at these sessions

- 100% of people said they would recommend these sessions to their ELT colleagues.

So we have seen that meeting as a community, and working together as a community is good for our personal wellbeing and helps to reduce our sense of isolation. It is good for our professional development and brings opportunities to network and meet new people. But what does it do for our individual businesses and for our industry as a whole?

Well, a whopping 85% felt that there had been a direct benefit to their school from them attending these sessions. But how did this benefit manifest itself?

Community is good for business

Businesses thrive when the people in them are motivated, inspired, enthused and happy. We all know of a business whose services we gladly use because of this – whether it is the small shop where everyone is always smiling or the accountants who are enthusiastic about your taxes; the business coach whose wall of certificates is always expanding or the restaurant that always has a new dish for you to taste (at home, of course). As customers, we can sense when a business is enthusiastic, keen to learn, innovative and happy. We gravitate towards these businesses, and then stay with them.

A good community group can bring enthusiasm and energy to a locked-down world; it can engage with people and inspire them; it can bring people together and pull us all towards the light at the end of tunnel. If a community group can do all this – and add in some professional development too – then that has to be good for business, doesn't it?

Over to you

So my parting words to you are these. No matter where you are in the world, you have ELT colleagues who are going through the same thing as you are and facing the same challenges. They too would love to share their success stories and brainstorm some new ideas, and are also wondering if they are doing the right thing in these turbulent times.

Whether you are working from home or back in school, there is an ELT community out there that you are very much a part of.

Take the first step. Find a group. If there isn't one in your area, set up a group. If you are the only school in your region, expand your search. But whatever you do and however you do it, find a way to meet up with your ELT colleagues. Build your own community. Support each other. I promise you, you won't regret it.

Steve Tulk is the Macmillan ELT consultant for the UK. Looking for a change from his career in Marketing, Steve became an ELT teacher and has taught for many years - in Europe, the Middle East and in the UK. He is an experienced teacher trainer and has also held academic management and school management positions in the UK and overseas.

Steve's particular areas of interest within the ELT classroom are the need to place a greater emphasis on meaningful communication practice, and increasing the representation of international accents in our class materials. Outside of the classroom, Steve's interest lies in how the ELT sector can develop stronger marketing and commercial skills.

As a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (the RSA), Steve enjoys the networking opportunities that this brings. He is a firm believer that, whilst the level of knowledge and experience in our industry is outstanding, the answers to our questions don't always come exclusively from within the ELT world.

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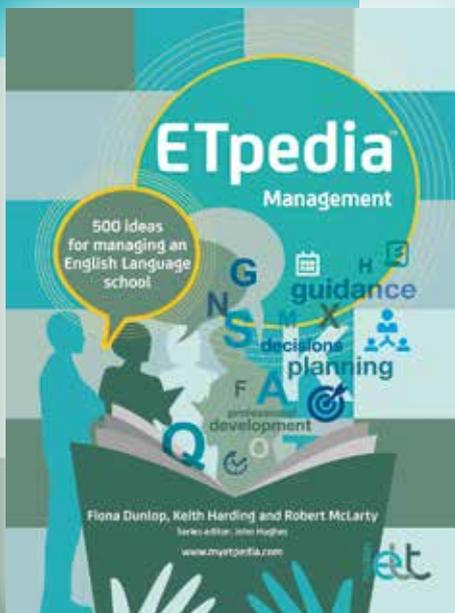
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13 feedback errors some managers make

Ben Dobbs considers some of the far-reaching implications of dealing with feedback.

Managers, in ELT and otherwise, make a series of errors as far as feedback is concerned. These errors are numerous and varied and impact upon functions and responsibilities typically conducted by anyone in a managerial role in ELT, ranging from gathering feedback formally or informally from students to discussing the outcomes of lesson observations with teachers. The dysfunctions that result from poorly handled feedback can range from minor annoyance or irritation on behalf of the teacher receiving it to horrendous damage to working relationships which may even impact upon areas such as staff turnover and retention of teachers.

Let us look at a selection of errors made by ELT managers and consider what learning experiences we can take from these worst practices.

Error 1 – Telling when you could be coaching a teacher to find their own solution

Traditionally, we may think of feedback as being a top-down matter from manager to subordinate. A manager explains to a subordinate – in our context, a teacher – what they did or are doing, the effects it has had or is having and, finally, what the manager wants or needs them to do in order to change or improve. The manager then congratulates themselves, feedback done!

This approach surfaces a major issue with feedback: the fact that the solutions and ideas generated are not those of the teacher receiving the feedback but are the insistence of the manager. The teaching style and beliefs of a manager do not necessarily, if at all, link to those of a teacher and so what the manager may do if teaching the same class is not immediately the same as what another teacher would do.

There is a better way, which is through utilising a coaching approach which

combines coaching questions to drive reflection with discussion and direction as needed. Coaching questions create a developmental conversation characterised by questions and answers focused on a goal, and are highly useful at the start of a feedback session. They do, however, come with the caveat that questions to stimulate reflection must never be too vague. Certainly, one question for a manager to avoid is the horrendous 'How did the lesson go?'. This question results in two potential outcomes: either a vague answer to a vague question such as 'fine' or attempting to guess what the manager wishes to hear. Better questions would include:

- 'What went well during the lesson?'
- 'What went not so well?'
- 'What did you learn about yourself and your teaching style?'
- 'What will you do differently next time you teach this topic or level?'
- 'What will you continue to do?'
- 'What support do you need from me?'

Learning experience for ELT managers: do not ignore or diminish the power of coaching or the importance of asking questions to encourage and stimulate useful and meaningful reflection. Never move immediately to telling or advising when providing feedback. Coach first, then advise or mentor based on ideas or experiences.

Error 2 – Over-reliance on the 'sandwich approach'

The ever-popular 'sandwich' approach is a dreadful way to provide feedback and is symptomatic of a cowardly manager who lacks the courage to have a real conversation (this is despite how popular and commonly used this approach is). This old favourite involves three steps:

1. Positive comments
2. Negative comments
3. (More) positive comments

During and after being on the receiving end of feedback from a manager using

this approach, the receiver goes through three stages:

1. Happiness, relief, satisfaction or delight at the positive feedback the manager has just delivered; typically, this will be detailed and examples will be provided by the manager giving feedback.

2. Confusion, surprise, shock or upset at the negative comments (typically, this is signalled by a stressed 'but' or 'however' in the style of a judge on reality TV!).

3. Confusion or irritation at the final positive feedback that arguably seems like (or is!) an afterthought; this step is often especially badly handled if it is an ambiguous or general comment or statement ('but everything is going really well' or 'you are doing a great job'), rather than meaningful feedback, solely intended to protect the feelings of the receiver (often in vain).

> "Each student will have a different perspective on the course and the teacher, and one lone student can never be truly representative of a whole even in closed, monocultural groups."

One further detriment of this approach is its top-down nature and reliance and on telling. Using this approach provides no opportunity for a question-based coaching approach to stimulate reflection.

Learning experience for ELT managers: the learning experience here is simple - do not use the sandwich approach; instead, have a real exchange that addresses issues openly and honestly and does not miss out on chances for coaching.

Error 3 – Choosing the wrong location for feedback provision

The right location for providing feedback is highly important. Seating areas, open plan offices or rooms surrounded by people are wholly inappropriate. This should seem obvious but, as many of us will have experienced during our careers, many managers will indeed forget this. A teacher has a right to feel comfortable in the feedback environment.

While working in a managerial role in a school, I was surprised to become an unwilling and unwitting audience to a post-course feedback debrief from a director to a teacher. From this, I observed two things: firstly, a manager who was completely oblivious to the importance of setting and, secondly, a teacher made to feel self-conscious. It may be easy and quick to provide feedback in passing but having any 'audience' at all should be received poorly by the teacher. Environments such as an open plan office or corridor are simply no good for giving feedback. Whether the feedback is positive or negative, observers and overhearers are undesirable.

Learning experience for ELT managers: choose a suitable feedback environment that meets the needs of the individual you are giving feedback to. Just because you would be happy with giving feedback there is no gauge if another will be happy to receive feedback there. If feedback turns into a discussion in a public place, it could very well be you, the manager, who loses face and, let us be honest about this, it would serve you right for not fully considering the rights of the team you, supposedly, lead.

Error 4 – Treating one source of feedback as representative of a whole

Managers will often be gathering feedback from students. In some cases, this will not be all students but will involve speaking with a small sample group of students or a single student which the manager will sometimes misguidedly treat as representative of the whole class.

Though this approach will often save time and is practical for feedback that is not at the end of a course, it remains a poor managerial practice. Each student will have a different perspective on the course and the teacher, and one lone student can never be truly representative of a whole even in closed, monocultural groups. This approach to gathering reactions is even worse for diverse groups (nationalities, personalities, cultures, ages, backgrounds, sectors, genders, perspective, learning styles, preferences and so on) with often vastly differing needs.

> Learning Experience for ELT Managers: if you are devoting time to obtaining feedback from students, do it well and do not fall victim to the idea that one student, or even a small focus group, will be representative of a whole class with diverse backgrounds, preferences, styles, needs, experiences, personalities and viewpoints. If feedback is to be useful, a larger sample is needed.

Error 5 – Misuse of feedback channels

Years ago, following a 'mid-week review' on an intensive training course by a newly appointed academic manager, I was shocked to receive an email regarding feedback the centre manager had received. What was so surprising was nothing to do with the feedback itself (even though this manager had made the error of treating one student as representative of an entire diverse group) but the fact that so many people were included in 'cc'; these included me (the trainer), the accommodation officer, company directors and many more. The motivation for this was unclear as to whether this was self-promotion on the part of the manager,

bad leadership or a misguided attempt at being concise and efficient. Whatever it was, the consequences were highly damaging to the working relationships and trust between those involved.

This leads us to our next point about handling feedback channels. In the case of the academic manager just mentioned, she had handled the channel of email very poorly indeed.

Though it should be obvious, managers should not risk damaging a working relationship by providing feedback with an undesired audience, for example by over-using the 'cc' function of email and emailing a group with specific comments for each individual simply to save time.

> Learning experience for ELT managers: make sure you choose the right channel for the receiver of the feedback; the reason for this is simply so the best can be gained from the feedback without working relationships being damaged or professional pride and privacy being negatively affected.

Error 6 – A focus on improvement and change and an omission of maintenance

Ask a group of managers in any sector and at any level of seniority what

the purpose of feedback is and you will invariably elicit responses such as 'improvement' and 'change'. This is revealing and shows where the priorities of too many managers lie as far as feedback is concerned. What happens if everything is perfect? When providing feedback, are managers to remain silent about elements that need no improvement and, for high performance, must be continued?

> Learning experience for ELT managers: an improvement-only approach to feedback shows a significant omission by the managers; that is, of course, neglecting to mention in feedback what needs to be kept, what should continue and what is working perfectly in the feedback recipient's performance. Useful feedback not only focuses on justified, actionable improvements for development but also on what is positive and should be maintained.

Error 7 – A heavy focus on the past with no mention of the future

Feedback is unavoidably dealt with after the event. Think of a manager providing feedback to a teacher about a lesson they have given: the feedback will, naturally, focus on the lesson just delivered. While the feedback provided looking at the past may be

useful to assist the receiver in realising some of their strengths or weaknesses, it may be limited in use as there is no long-term learning experience: in other words, no future focus for lessons beyond the observed one.

If teachers are to draw useful and usable benefits from post-observation, managers must therefore focus on the learning experiences for the future and make the transition from 'what you did in the lesson' to 'what we need next time'; 'what you should continue' and 'what can be improved'.

> Learning experience for ELT managers: feedback should not simply pull apart a past event or performance but should link this to future development and potential for higher performance including actions to take.

Error 8 – Being too specific

Useful feedback for teachers should provide overall benefit to a teacher. In the case of post-observation feedback, specific feedback is needed on specific aspects of the specific lesson; however, more general points of feedback linked to methodologies and approach as well as further associated training needs may arise. This is especially important

to address if the lesson or content is to be regularly repeated.

There is no point in providing overtly critical feedback focusing on the minutiae of a lesson that is not going to be repeated or, at least, repeated regularly. Being overly specific in this case yields no future benefit, only hindsight.

> Learning experience for ELT managers: consider how specific and focused on minute points your feedback really needs to be or if more general learning experiences and developmental points need to be mentioned.

Error 9 – Reluctance to obtain feedback on the feedback

True feedback is a discussion. If a manager insists on taking a top-down 'telling' approach rather than engaging in a coaching style conversation, then there is no room for the feedback provider, the manager, to improve. As well as being poor leadership, this also does the manager no favours as they do not have the possibility to advance their competence in the essential leadership function of providing feedback.

The end of the feedback from the manager should not be the end of the conversation. If a manager really wishes to develop as a feedback provider, there must be willingness to receive feedback on the feedback. In practice, this means three things:

1. The recipient will explain if they accept the feedback or not and why.

2. The recipient provides developmental feedback to their manager on the manager's competences in providing feedback.

3. Training for managers and staff linked to feedback must stress not just how to give feedback but also how to obtain and receive feedback, including reacting to it.

How many managers would be brave enough to try this and leave themselves open to scrutiny?

> Learning experience for ELT managers: the end of feedback being provided need not be the end of the discussion, there is an opportunity for a manager to also develop their own competences. You need to be bold and ask for feedback from your recipient on how effective your style and approach of providing feedback really is.

Error 10 – Failure to provide justification for the feedback given

However motivational they may be, utterances such as 'brilliant', 'fantastic', 'great', 'excellent' and so on do not, ultimately, provide development as the recipient of the feedback does not know why their performance is being praised. This is not to undervalue the importance of affirmation, as this is useful in motivating the recipient.

Whether we are discussing positive aspects or negative, things to improve or alter or things to keep in a lesson, justification for the comments a manager makes must be provided if we are to understand the reasons why a comment is being made or why something actually matters.
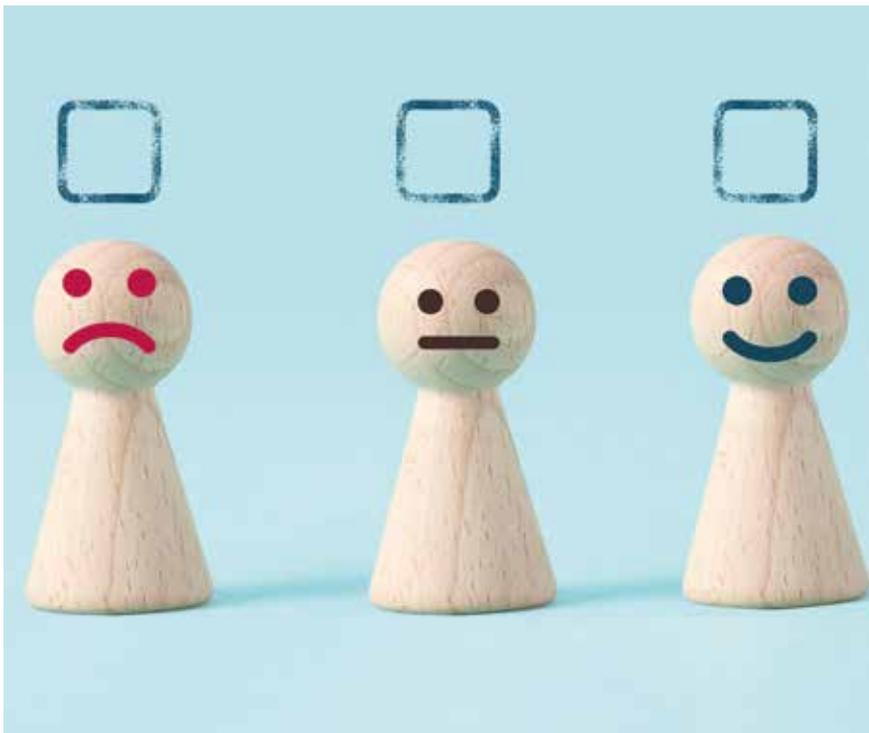
Learning experience for ELT managers: maintain provision of affirmative feedback and especially continue to provide genuine praise to motivate others; however, never forget to justify developmental points being made and explain the reasons for and thinking behind the feedback, providing as much exemplification and support as needed, including the benefits of any recommendations made.

Error 11 – Neglecting the feelings of the receiver

There is always a presumption that teachers will take things 'professionally' not 'personally', and while this sentiment is fine on paper, feedback on one's teaching, style, materials and so on is immensely personal. Receiving feedback on a lesson is never going to be the same as receiving feedback on a product, the production of which the receiver has no control over. Comments, positive or negative, on a lesson are immediately comments on the individual.

The response of a manager who lacks the communicative competence or empathy to understand this will often be to remind the receiver not to be 'defensive'. This poses the questions of why any teacher should not feel the need to defend themselves. If we are truly emotionally and professionally invested in our teaching, we will do. A manager who is ready to criticise a teacher for this clearly does not value their desire to produce and teach the best lessons they can.

Learning experience for ELT managers: be mindful of the feelings of the feedback receiver and remember that in the unique context of feedback provision to teachers, there is no line between the personal and the professional.

Error 12 – Commenting on areas you know nothing or little about

I was once observed teaching an examination class and, as part of the practice for the spoken component of the exam, I asked a question taken from published previous exams. During the feedback from the observer, I was rather taken aback to hear the observer criticise my use of the question itself as he felt it was 'too wide' and 'like a PhD' question. My response being that this was an *actual* question that candidates might encounter was met with disinterest. Though his criticisms of the question itself may have been valid, his comments on my decision to use it were not. The observer's motivation behind this? He did not know enough about the exam I was preparing the candidates for and was only observing me by virtue of his position, not his expertise.

Learning experience for ELT managers: do not lie to yourself that your position makes you all-knowing when it comes to lessons and content. Be a leader and be willing to admit that you too are learning. Use the competences of teachers in your team and value them.

Error 13 – Making comments for the sake of comments

For many managers, providing feedback acts as a form of job justification – if they are giving feedback (which may be useful or not), then they are earning their salary. This leads to an odd habit of commenting on anything or everything without any purpose other than to provide comments for the sake of doing something.

Learning experience for ELT managers: you will likely have the chance to prepare your feedback to another: if you do, think to yourself about the justification behind each comment you will make. If you cannot justify each comment, do not make it.

Conclusions

For both providers and receivers, feedback is complex and requires delicate handling and a good deal of thought and skill. Only a deluded or ill-informed manager would presume that just because feedback provision is such a frequent and obvious part of their role, that it is going to be quick, easy or without consequences.

Finally, to any managers reading this, let me ask you: are you handling feedback in the best possible way? To any teachers reading this, I have three questions: what feedback horror stories, annoyances or experiences, good or bad, have you had? What can you do to make sure the feedback you receive is useful? What feedback do you need to provide to your managers about their feedback?

> "Receiving feedback on a lesson is never going to be the same as receiving feedback on a product, the production of which the receiver has no control over."

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Magnificent brochure skies: a great journey

Richard Gabbrielli describes how he teaches English for Tourism.

'A view? Oh a view!
How delightful a view is!'
– E. M. Forster, *A Room with a View* (page 8)

In the sincere hope that the tourism industry as a whole and in all its forms (domestic, inbound and outbound) will recover and revitalize as soon as possible from the unprecedented impact of the Covid-19 epidemic worldwide, I would like to report on two ninety-minute classes on tourism (and world culture) that form a supplementary part of a mandatory, practical Business English course I offer to Intermediate-level students in my department. These classes have always been received well and I am always impressed with my students' level of participation, contribution, and their critical and creative thinking skills.

Classroom procedure

In the first class, by way of a warm-up activity, I invite students to get into groups of four (or three) to discuss what they already know and understand about the three broad areas within tourism listed below:

- Niche/mass tourism
- Cultural tourism
- Nature tourism

After ten minutes, I elicit ideas from the students, and allow them to elaborate on any particular points of interest raised. After we have generated enough material for each category, we refine the list and produce an easy-to-use framework with clear definitions which either I or students write on the board. Students also take a photo of the information with their Smartphones for easy reference when they are working in groups. Here are some of the excellent ideas generated by my students:

In the next phase, I ask students to discuss what kind of language they expect to find in tourism brochures. After sharing some ideas with the whole class, I pass around several tourism brochures to each group (sourced from various tourist locations in the UK) and instruct students to read them communicatively in pairs, first by taking turns reading

Niche/Mass tourism	Cultural tourism	Nature tourism
Big profit/Low profit *Small-scale businesses/* *International companies* *Special interests/Package* *tours* *Small groups/Large groups* *High quality/Standard* *Expensive/ Cheap* *Leisure* *Relaxation*	*Buildings (museums,* *art galleries)* *Festivals* *Exhibitions* *Shows* *Learning (study* *abroad)* *Events (food)* *History* *Traditions*	*Geography (jungle, forest,* *desert, mountain)* *Connecting with the* *outdoors* *Extreme sports* *(parachuting, bungee* *jumping)* *Eco friendly (ecotourism,* *local, conservation)* *Wildlife*

aloud, listening and shadowing, and then by reading them individually. After this, to help students become better acquainted with the discourse of tourism, I get them to read the brochures again carefully while making a list of the vocabulary and expressions that are new and/or of interest to them (with translations if required). Following this, students share and compare notes.

Drawing from Crystal (1995), who explores the stylistic features of the persuasive language of commercial advertising, each group of students is tasked with finding particular lexical combinations in the brochures that are used for descriptions: adjective+noun collocations. Here are some of the examples found by students after 20 minutes on task (with a little bit of help and encouragement from me).

Adjective: *Beautiful* followed by the nouns:	Adjective: *Elegant* followed by the nouns:	Adjective: *Excellent* followed by the nouns:
■ building ■ church ■ gardens ■ rooms ■ statues ■ valley ■ views	■ dining room ■ restaurant ■ surroundings ■ stately homes ■ style ■ rooms	■ museums ■ networks ■ places ■ facilities

Adjective: *Fascinating* followed by the nouns:	Adjective: *Fashionable* followed by the nouns:	Adjective: *Fine* followed by the nouns:
■ exhibitions ■ glimpse ■ journey ■ museum ■ sights ■ tour ■ visitor centre	■ restaurant ■ society	■ interiors ■ views ■ carvings ■ wines

Adjective: *Glorious* followed by the nouns	Adjective: *Historic* followed by the nouns:	Adjective: *Impressive* followed by the nouns:
■ array ■ gardens ■ parkland ■ setting ■ sunsets ■ views	■ area ■ background ■ sites ■ importance ■ value	■ building ■ castle ■ hall ■ remains ■ views

Adjective: *Magnificent* followed by the nouns:	Adjective: *Outstanding* followed by the nouns:	Adjective: *Picturesque* followed by the nouns:
■ apartment ■ collection ■ fortress ■ house ■ room ■ site ■ skies ■ views	■ areas ■ exhibition ■ materials ■ paintings ■ quality ■ beauty ■ craftmanship	■ cathedral ■ villages ■ landscapes ■ views

Adjective: *Spectacular* followed by the nouns:	Adjective: *Traditional* followed by the nouns:	Adjective: *Unique* followed by the nouns:
■ countryside ■ gardens ■ views ■ remains ■ walks	■ cooking ■ cuisine ■ favourites ■ menu ■ values ■ atmosphere	■ experience ■ insight ■ part ■ style ■ opportunity

"These classes have always been received well and I am always impressed with my students' level of participation, contribution, and their critical and creative thinking skills."

Other significant (single) samples found were:

dramatic landscapes
fascinating exhibitions
lovely gifts
magnificent display
peaceful/serene atmosphere
quiet spaces
sparkling selection
stunning/superb/breathtaking views
tranquil gardens

At this juncture, still in their groups, I ask students to try and use some of the adjective+noun combinations above to verbally describe tourist spots, galleries, parks, monuments, buildings, facilities and eateries in their hometowns or other places of choice (holiday destinations in the past, etc.).

Next, I announce to the students that they will be making a brochure and presenting it in groups. In the first step, each group of students chooses one of the travel destination cards below that I have prepared for them (teachers may use these cards if they so wish):

Travel Destination Card 1. The Chile and Easter Island Tour

Chile is a spectacular country in South America. In particular, northern Chile boasts some unforgettable highlights from the bustling cosmopolitan capital of Santiago to the picturesque mountainside vineyards of Colchagua and the dramatic landscapes of the Atacama Desert. On this tour, you can witness a breathtaking sunset at Moon Valley in the desert, and if you are lucky, you can observe flamingos on the beautiful Chaxa Lagoon. In the second part of the tour, the remote island know as Easter Island (Rapa Nui), with its enigmatic and striking Moai statues, also offers you a uniquely wonderful experience. After marvelling at the statues, you can then relax on the pristine white sands of this island's famous Anakena beach.

Travel Destination Card 2. The North India Tour

India is a vast country and requires a lot of time to visit everything it has to offer. However, this short tour offers a spectacular window on north India: its sights, smells, tastes, and vistas. This fascinating tour encourages you to delve into the heart and soul of this glorious country. Experience intriguing Hindu rituals on the sacred Ganges River and witness the magnificent sunrise on a boat trip. On this tour, you can journey to the beautiful and mesmerizing world-renowned Taj Mahal in Agra. Also, you can lose yourself in the captivating mountain views in Shimla. Finally, you can explore the majestic Golden Temple in the holy city of Amritsar and marvel at the Sikh's Golden Symbol of Brotherhood.

Travel Destination Card 3. The French Riviera Tour

The French Riviera is home to some of the most beautiful scenic spots in Europe. This tour offers you the opportunity to explore the famous sights of Nice, the charming harbour town of Antibes, and Cannes before visiting the famed principality of Monaco. In Nice, you can take a leisurely stroll along the Promenade Anglais and take in the glorious views of the glittering Mediterranean Sea. In Antibes, you can visit the fascinating Picasso Museum and venture through the bustling marketplace where you can buy a wide variety of local produce. Finally, you can visit the elegant surroundings of Villefranche-sur-Mer with its enchanting sandy beaches, excellent restaurants and picturesque streets.

Travel Destination Card 4. The Norway Tour

Norway's Arctic Circle tour takes you on a magical journey to witness the spectacular Northern Lights (Aurora). Experience the light dancing across the sky while gliding through the dramatic views of the mountains and fjords on your exhilarating sledding adventures on Alaskan huskies and reindeer. You will also be able to savour authentic Arctic meals (especially 'bidos' stew) around a warm campfire and make friends with the local Sami people. From the comfort of the Aurora camp, you will be able to gaze in wonder at the mysterious and dramatic Northern Lights. On the last part of the tour, you will be able to enjoy a fascinating walking tour of the charming city of Tromsø's historic centre. Known as the gateway to the Arctic, Tromsø is the perfect place to end our tour with a leisurely exploration of its charming centuries-old wooden houses.

In the next step, I invite students to take turns reading their chosen card to the group while paying particular attention to the content, vocabulary and the adjective+noun collocations (confirming information and resolving anything that is unclear together). In these cards, I have included some of the target collocations from the brochures that students had examined previously. I then ask the students to take out their laptop computers (all students get one in their first year) and use the internet to find out more about the place they have chosen (buildings, people, food, historical places, etc.) using the key information provided on the card. Students are given some time to discuss what parts they wish to research and how they wish to present the information they find. Following on from this step, they are given 45 minutes to design a group tourist brochure with a good balance of text and images, using PowerPoint. To encourage participation from all students in this task, I inform them that each student must take an equal part in the presentation and that each person should concentrate on a different aspect of the brochure. They are also encouraged to use as many adjective+noun collocations as possible to enhance the descriptions of the features they are presenting on. During this part of the class, students can also use the brochures I have brought to class to help them.

In the following class, each group presents its brochure to the class (10-15 minutes per group). However, depending on the number of students and the size of the classroom, I sometimes get students to present their brochures to other groups, rotating when they have finished. This often proves to be less threatening, more interactive, and lends itself to more effective communication between the students as they can respond in real time, offer positive feedback, ask questions, and seek clarification if necessary. Finally, I ask students to reflect upon the good points of each destination and discuss whether they would like to visit the other groups' destinations and why (why not).

> "To encourage participation from all students in this task, I inform them that each student must take an equal part in the presentation and that each person should concentrate on a different aspect of the brochure."

I have found that students get very enthusiastic in this very creative final phase. It is always a joy to watch their well-researched and very informative presentations and hear them use choice expressions from the language we have covered in class.

Final thoughts

The tourism activity described above has always gone down well and students tend to produce excellent pieces of work at the end. To assist students further with their brochures, I also draw their attention to the proper and correct use of citations and commonly-accepted guidelines regarding the sourcing and management of online references, information and images.

From a pedagogical perspective, the activity, which is spread out over two ninety-minute sessions, allows students to gain a better understanding of the three areas of tourism (niche/mass tourism, cultural tourism and nature tourism), to discover the key language used in tourism brochures, and is designed to engage students in the following aspects of active learning:

- Language awareness
- Discussion
- Presentation skills
- Creative and critical thinking
- Interpersonal skills
- Individual accountability
- Group work, cooperation and group accountability

While I was initially concerned about student groups choosing the same destination card for their brochures, this has never really posed a problem as student presentations and brochures tend to be uniquely different in terms of approach, content, focus and design.

I am fully aware that only two classes cannot really do justice to the endless possibilities and avenues for exploration within the exciting area of tourism. If given the opportunity to offer one or two extra classes on this topic, I think asking students to produce a brochure on their own chosen destination (perhaps tourist spots in Japan) would be a suitable follow-up activity (or even as an assignment). As an extended outreach project, if the students produced brochures dedicated to local places of interest in Hiroshima Prefecture in need of (revamped) English advertising materials, that could be a good way to entice overseas visitors to experience the magnificent brochure skies in our part of Japan.

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The news clip project

Dina Rosita Sari describes a useful project-based activity.

I have always been a huge fan of project-based learning (PBL). It enables my students to develop critical thinking and creativity, to engage in real-world problems, as well as to be deeply immersed in meaningful learning activities. When students work together on a project, they depend on each other, thus collaboration and communication become indispensable. These two skills are, in fact, what I like the most about PBL. Over the years, I have learned how the abilities to collaborate and communicate with other people are the key to success, particularly in my professional life. I know it might sound a cliché, but it is undeniably true. I guess it is worth it then to nurture these two skills at any possible time during my teaching. PBL allows me to do just that.

Recently, I employed PBL to help my students to produce a news clip. The idea crossed my mind when I was watching the news on the BBC YouTube channel. The aim was to get my students to create a news clip while at the same time, learning the target language. Not only activating the four language skills, this kind of activity also creates an optimal learning environment where students could develop essential skills to get them ready for 'real life'. Following the principle of a task-based approach, I designed a personalized worksheet to help students in completing the project. They worked collaboratively on a series of assignments which fall into three stages; lead-in activities (Task 1-2), the production of the video clip (Task 3-9), and a follow-up group assessment (Task 10). This project took approximately an entire month to complete.

Lead-in activities

Task 1

In this initial stage, students are asked to watch and analyze one particular news clip. The purpose is to get them familiar with the organization of the video and to elicit their existing knowledge about it. Students, working in a small group of four or five, discuss and answer some questions (see the worksheet) about this particular video. Language teachers with advanced level students can give more freedom to students by asking them to independently select the clip they want to analyze.

Task 2

The next step is to ask students to pay careful attention to the linguistic features of the news clip. Since English is a foreign language for my students, I asked them to activate the subtitles button to make it easier for them to catch the words. Together, students answer several questions (see the worksheet) and are also encouraged to get more information from the internet. This activity allows students to gain far richer knowledge of the tenses, active and stative verbs, the use of passive or active voice, and the sentence structure used in a news script, making them confident once they start writing their own.

Producing a news clip

Task 3

Writing the draft of the news script is the first step in the following stage. In order to do this, students are first asked to picture their plan by thinking of the name of the news program, the headline, the short summary of the news story, the possibility of expanding on the scene, and whether there will be any interview or not. Every group member is encouraged to share ideas and suggestions as part of their contribution. Once they have a clearer idea of the news clip they want to produce, they work collaboratively in developing the news script.

Task 4

Task 4 asks students to check the linguistic features of the news script they have produced in order to determine its accuracy and quality. A series of questions (see the worksheet) are given as an assessment tool. Students benefit from this activity as they are given an opportunity to utilize their previously attained knowledge as they check their work, resulting in its retention. Rechecking one's own work is a form of exercise that fosters learning autonomy, too.

Task 5

In this task, students critically think and decide on the settings of the clip, such as where the shooting and the interview will take place. In addition, students are encouraged to choose the technological tools (e.g. microphone, voice recorder and camera), graphics, or properties that they need in order to produce the news clip. A list of questions to ask the interviewee(s) should also be prepared. This task develops students' ability to pay attention to detail, thus achieving thoroughness, and accuracy of the project is more likely.

Task 6

To make their draft of the news script more comprehensive, in this task students are encouraged to break down the script into three different parts; time, visual and audio. Together, they decide on the time duration, as well as the kinds of visual and audio elements they will use in the news clip. This information should be written clearly and briefly on a template provided (see the worksheet). When the template is completed, students should consult with the teacher to get any corrective feedbacks.

Task 7

The next task requires students to think carefully about shared responsibility. Students break down the kinds of roles, i.e. script writer, news anchor, interviewer, voice actor, videographer, and video editor, that should be performed by each member of the group on the template given (see the worksheet). Please note that one student may share the same job as

the other member. Breaking down everyone's role delivers a message that every member is expected to contribute their efforts equally to the group project, thereby eliminating dishonesty in which one student may work harder than the rest of the members, or vice versa.

Task 8

Now, it is time for the students to discuss the digital tools, including hardware (a laptop or a mobile phone) and software, which they can use to join both visual and audio components. Language teachers can take this opportunity to help students exercise their digital literacy by introducing simple applications, such as Windows Movie Maker and KineMaster. Of course, students with advance digital competence can employ more complex applications, for example Filmora and Camtasia. Nevertheless, teachers should inform students that the type of hardware and software selected is not considered as part of the assessment.

Task 9

Before the students start working on the digital tools, they are asked to check the pronunciation and intonation of the news anchor and voice actor. As guidance, a series of questions (see the worksheet) are provided for the students to discuss and answer within their group. In this task cycle, students are also encouraged to listen to several news clips from various sources that they can find, either on television or the internet, for optimal language components input. They are now ready to record! Wish them good luck and let them work as autonomously as possible.

Follow-up activity

Task 10

In this final stage, students assess and do a critical reflection of their group performance. This activity allows students to evaluate their teamwork, identify the challenges they encounter, and describe briefly the solution that they apply. By becoming more aware of these issues, students are expected to be able to consolidate and

strengthen their learning for a better performance in the future.

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This news clip project has enabled my students to engage all kinesthetically, cognitively, affectively and socially with the language learning. It also succeeded in enhancing my students' motivation as they worked together toward the achievement of the desired outcome. Moreover, the project, requiring students to investigate a certain issue in their surroundings, has fostered my students' critical thinking as well as social and cultural sensitivity. Together, all these advantages have adequately served as important evidence of student-centered learning.

One of the tasks in the worksheet requires students to do an interview in order to elicit facts and/or statements from interviewee(s). Through this particular activity, students demonstrate their ability to do negotiation with other people. One thing to remember, however, is that we should remind our students to always ask for permission from the person whom they wish to get information from before conducting the interview. They also need to know how to handle rejection, if the person says no, pragmatically and move onto a backup plan. This teaches our students about courtesy as well as protecting other peoples' privacy, which are valuable life lessons that an ordinary language classroom might miss.

Finally, it is important to provide students with a worksheet to guide them through the completion of the project. Equally important is to offer the teacher's continuous assistance along the process. When I applied this news clip project in my classroom, I told my students that they could reach me to consult me on their work at all times, be it in the morning, afternoon, or even at night! I also made sure that they got the help they needed as soon as possible to keep them feel engaged and motivated. It is very challenging to spend extra time for our students, particularly outside of school hours, but a little bit of sacrifice won't hurt.

The news project worksheet

Task 1

Working in your groups, go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KD44ynY6Wts. Watch the video and answer these questions:

1. What kind of video clip is this?

2. What is the main topic being discussed?

3. Who do you see in the beginning of the video clip?

4. Who else appeared in the video apart from the news anchor?

5. What kind of graphics appeared in the video clip?

Task 2

Watch the video again and pay attention to the language used. You can activate the subtitles button provided by YouTube. Discuss this within your group and try to get more information about writing a good news script for TV news. Don't forget to take notes on important details. Here are several questions to guide you:

1. What tense (or tenses) is used by the news anchor in the video clip?

2. Is the use of passive voice acceptable for TV news?

3. What kinds of verbs are best used for TV news?

4. How should we present a story in TV news?

5. How does a news anchor start and end a news program?

Task 3

Now, let's produce your own video clip. In order to do this, you will first need to write a good news script. In your group, discuss and answer the following questions to help you with the outline:

1. Can you think of a particular name for your news program? What is it?

2. What is the main topic/headline of the news?

3. What is the summary of the story in the news script?

4. Can you expand the news on the scene?

5. Should there be some people to be interviewed? Who are they?

Based on the outline, write your first draft of the news script. You may revise this later if you wish.

Task 4

Check the variety and accuracy of the language in your news script. Make sure you address the following questions:

1. Have you included action verbs in your script? List some of them.

2. Have you used appropriate connectives (e.g. *and*, *however*, *so*) in your script? List some of them.

3. Are your sentences structurally correct?

4. Have you used lead in your script? Is it short and attractive enough to capture the audience's attention?

5. Has the story in your news script answered the *wh-questions*? List some of them.

Task 5

In order to produce a good video clip, you will need to think thoroughly of the setting(s), tools, media, or properties that you might need. Use these questions as guidance:

1. What are the settings of your video clip-indoor and/or outdoor?

2. How would you take the video? With a mobile phone or a camera?

3. Do you need special outfits for the news anchor/journalist? What are they? Where would you get them?

4. Are there any other tools that you need? For example, will you need a voice recorder and a microphone for the interview?

5. Will you need graphics to convey the news in greater details? Where will you get them?

6. Will you need voice-over and/or subtitles for the news clip? How would you do this?

7. What questions will you ask the interviewee(s)?

Task 6

Plan your news script, using the template below. Use your group's draft on Task 4.

Television News Report Script		
Time	**Visual**	**Audio**

The news project worksheet (continued)

Note: The time column indicates the duration in which the news anchor should spend time reading the script; visual column contains the visual effects (e.g. video and photographs); and the rightmost column must contain any audio components.

Task 7

Now decide the roles of each of the group member. List the name of each member of your group in the left column and write the roles or jobs she/he takes part in the process of making the news video clip i.e. *script writer, news anchor, interviewer, voice-actor, videographer* and *video editor* in the right column. Please note that one member may perform several different roles.

Name of student	Role and/or job description

Group name:					
Group Assessment					
Descriptions	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1. Every member of the group gave their contribution to the project.					
2. Every member of the group was involved in group discussions.					
3. We completed every task on time.					
4. We cooperated with each other during the completion of the project.					
5. We did research in order to get more ideas and information regarding the project.					
Total					
6. List 2 challenges you encountered when you completed the group project.					
7. How did you overcome these problems?					

> "When students work together on a project, they depend on each other, thus collaboration and communication become indispensable. These two skills are, in fact, what I like the most about PBL."

Task 8

Within your groups, discuss the technological tool that you would like to employ to produce the video clip. Please give reasons why you select this particular tool.

Task 9

Before you do the recording, it is better to check the pronunciation and intonation of your news anchor and voice actor. For this purpose, answer the questions below:

1. Have you checked the pronunciation of your news anchor and voice actor? How can you do this?

2. Have you checked their intonation?

3. Do you think the news anchor and voice actor speak at the right speed?

4. Have you checked the styles and expressions of the news anchor?

Task 10

Let's assess your group performance. Put a tick for the score that best represents the descriptions provided. A score of 1 indicates that you disagree with the statement. A score of 5 indicates that you agree entirely with the statement.

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Mirroring for English

Sean Burgoine describes a very useful skill for improving communication skills.

After more than 20 years in the EFL classroom I have seen a significant number of English presentations and consider them to be an important part of the language classroom. Yet despite many students being able to create interesting content and clear structures, there is often a lack of delivery skills that can really engage an audience. Although the reasons for this may be cultural or that students lack confidence working in their second language, as with any skill, mastering a number of important techniques leads to improvement.

The Mirroring Project

Having a great interest in phonology and pronunciation skills, I recently discovered a technique called 'mirroring'. Popularized recently by Elaine Tarone and Colleen Meyers

(2018), mirroring involves imitating both the verbal and non-verbal behavior of a model speaker and is intended to improve intelligibility by focusing on the suprasegmental features of English L2 speakers. In a longitudinal case study at the University of Minnesota, Tarone and Meyers show how their subject 'Mary' (a pseudonym), a Chinese student of English, effectively progresses from an initial monotone, and an often indecipherable speaker, to one with confidence and proficient English intonation and rhythm. Although the goal of Tarone and Meyers' 'Mirroring Project' was to improve intelligibility, it was obvious that a by-product of this activity was enhanced presentation skills. Therefore, it appeared a logical step to introduce this technique into an English Public Communications class. What appears below is my version of

mirroring, adapted to focus more on the skills necessary for presentation delivery. It includes notes on how to adapt it to an online format.

Why teach presentation skills?

Although presentations are not interactive, and therefore lack value in a conversation class that should be focusing on communication between two or more parties, there is much to be gained by the English language learner in developing L2 presentation skills. According to Murdoch (2020), presentation skills are a much-neglected area of EAP, seemingly being hastily crammed in at the end of courses. He notes this is regrettable because the ability to give professional presentations is a greatly

sought-after skill by international employers and can lead to greater self-esteem. Motivation is thus high for students to improve this core skill. Bankowski (2010) also makes an important point when noting that the challenges of the research and delivery of an academic presentation can often lead to students feeling 'anxiety, confusion and a lack of understanding' (p. 187). This highlights the necessity of instruction to prepare students as better presenters. Especially in EFL contexts such as mine in Japan, the use of English amongst peers is uncommon and even oral activities in small groups can cause anxiety.

Mirroring for presentation delivery skills

There are many aspects to the creation of a skillful presentation including content, structure, design and delivery. Yet it is probably this last aspect which receives the least instructional attention and this is why I chose to specifically address presentation delivery with mirroring. The semester for my English Public Communications class is broken up into three separate modules; two mirroring modules each with different models, followed by a final original presentation module. In the final presentation, students choose their own topic and it is hoped that the techniques learnt through the semester from the mirroring modules will be incorporated into the students' individual presentation style.

In Tarone and Meyers' Mirroring Project, the student, Mary, is observed and recorded three times and Meyers mentions that the project takes a minimum of two to three weeks, although it is unclear how many lessons there are per week. For my purposes, the mirroring requires six 90-minute lessons when done initially, and five 90-minute lessons the second time as the first introductory lesson is unnecessary. Below is a detailed breakdown of the activities in each module. Although each lesson is 90 minutes, for some lessons, such as Lesson 2 with the transcription, some unfinished class work can flow over into homework.

Module 1

Lesson 1: Intro to mirroring

The first lesson seeks to outline and explain to students 1) why it is important to learn presentation skills and 2) what mirroring is.

1. In groups have students brainstorm a list of situations or professions where public speaking might be required. These are then shared with the class (teachers, academics, instructors of any type, any kind of company employee, weddings, politicians, lawyers, performers of any description, etc.). This highlights the wide range of people who speak publicly.

> "Especially in EFL contexts such as mine in Japan, the use of English amongst peers is uncommon and even oral activities in small groups can cause anxiety."

2. Show the students an example of mirroring from Tarone and Meyers' 'Mirroring Project'. A workshop video using the example of Mary is freely available on YouTube by searching for 'Meyers, mirroring'. As Meyers does in the workshop, elicit responses from students with regards to the first video of Mary. 'What does Mary do well?' 'What doesn't she do well?' Show students the model that Mary chooses (TED talk of Yang Lan), then the proceeding 'cold version' video followed by the final version so that students understand the process that is required.

Lesson 2: Selection of model and transcription

This second lesson involves 1) student selection of a 'model', 2) vetting of this choice by the teacher, 3) selection of a section of the model's presentation and 4) transcription of the selected presentation section.

1. For the selection of the model, students are asked to choose two models that they may like to mirror, from which together with the teacher, the best model is chosen. Students are directed to choose models that they consider to be expressive in both their verbal and non-verbal communication. With regards to native and non-native speaker choice, I am less enthusiastic about students choosing a non-native speaker than Meyers, but I do tell students that non-native speakers of high proficiency may be chosen. Obviously, if a heavily accented model is selected it would not be an appropriate model, as students are expected to produce the language of the model as closely to the original as possible. TED talks are the most obvious choice when searching for a model but students in the past have also used YouTube and even monologues from movies.

2. As the teacher probably has greater insights into the richness of suprasegmental features of a speaker and perhaps even which presentation delivery is more skillful, view the two models and choose the better one together.

3. A short section of the presentation, about 7–10 sentences, should be selected for transcribing. This is usually the beginning of a talk but not always. Discourage students from choosing too large a section. The emphasis is on quality not quantity.

4. As a listening exercise, and to increase the students' familiarity with the talk, have students transcribe their chosen section. Although most TED talks already have the talks transcribed, have students use this transcription only as a means of checking their own work.

Lesson 3: Transcription analysis

This third lesson involves 1) a short lecture and 2) a detailed analysis of the transcription and the creation of what I call an 'enhanced script'.

1. So that students may more readily identify suprasegmental features in their chosen model's speech, I give a short lecture explaining and giving examples of stress, rhythm, intonation, linking and reductions.

2. Students will then need to repeatedly listen to and watch their model to make an enhanced script. An enhanced script may include arrows to indicate rising or falling intonation, capital letters to indicate stress or any other symbols that a student may recognize to show verbal features of speech. Although officially agreed upon IPA notation for such features does exist, this is beyond the scope of a public

speaking course and therefore any symbol that the student themself understands is acceptable. Short notes on non-verbal actions or expressions should also be included. As Meyers suggests, it is best to only use the audio when analyzing verbal features and to mute the audio when analyzing non-verbal features. A checklist of features to look at and listen for is also useful (see Figure 1).

Lesson 4: 'Cold version' mirroring

For lesson four, I have chosen to do as Tarone and Meyers did in their project by including the creation of a 'cold version' or first draft of the mirroring. This involves students taking a video of themselves performing the mirroring on their smartphones. If there are time constraints this lesson could be done for homework but as was discovered during the online project, the limited space in student accommodation severely limited the non-verbal aspects of delivery. It is recommended that students use class time so that they can assist each other with video recordings and use the space afforded to them by the school or university.

Lesson 5: Peer feedback session

This lesson provides the teacher and fellow students the opportunity to review the first draft of the mirroring and give feedback.

1. Students gather in groups of four and in turn show first the video of their model, then the video of their first draft. After viewing both videos,

students have the opportunity to highlight areas that have been done well and areas where the student in the video could improve.

2. While students are doing the group feedback sessions, the teacher individually views each student's model and first draft, taking notes and giving feedback to the student that either offers hints for improvement or provides confidence through praise.

Lesson 6: Live mirroring performance

Unlike the Meyers' mirroring project, which was entirely video recorded, the final stage of this module fulfills the English Public Communications course objectives by doing the mirroring live in front of the class to truly recreate the sense of speaking in public. For this final mirroring performance, each student first does the live mirroring and then shows the original model. Students are graded according to a rubric which includes both verbal and non-verbal aspects of presentation. (See Figure 2 for module summary)

Module 2

Module 1 is repeated with a new model and without the first introductory lesson.

Module 3

Final 'original' presentation

For the final presentation with the students' original content, very little instruction is provided as the focus is on the *delivery* of the presentation. The intention is for students to apply the

Mirroring checklist	
Non-verbal	
Use of space	✓
Facial expressions	☐
Gestures	✓
Eyebrow movements	☐
Voice	
Volume	☐
Pace	✓
Pausing	☐
Other variations	☐
Pronunciation	
Stress	☐
Rhythm	☐
Intonation	✓
Linking	✓
Reductions	☐

Figure 1

Main Mirroring Module	
Lesson 1	■ Short discussion on the benefits of having presentation skills ■ Viewing of Tarone and Meyers' Mirroring Project (Mary)
Lesson 2	■ Selection of mirroring 'model' ■ Transcription of segment to be mirrored
Lesson 3	■ Mini-lecture on suprasegmentals ■ Analysis of segment to be mirrored (using checklist)
Lesson 4	■ Memorization and practice of segment to be mirrored ■ Make video recording of mirroring (cold version/first draft)
Lesson 5	■ Peer feedback of video (in groups) ■ Teacher feedback (individual)
Lesson 6	■ Live presentation of mirroring segments ■ Viewing of original 'model' for comparison

Figure 2

techniques they have been mirroring in the first two projects. In a sense, it is taking away the guide rails that the mirroring had previously provided. There is a short discussion of the type of content that could be appropriate (personal experience, an area of expertise, an idea worth sharing) and students are reminded of the importance of creating an enhanced script with all the necessary notation for intonation and stress. Students may need to consult with the teacher to confirm some of these areas. A short time frame of 5–7 minutes is advised.

Adjustments and modifications necessary for online mirroring

After beginning the semester in the classroom and successfully completing our first 6-unit mirroring activity, a local spike in Covid-19 infections forced our classes online. While this did prove challenging, with the use of Microsoft Teams and its breakout rooms, the class was able to continue relatively unaffected. For those unfamiliar with breakout rooms, they are 'rooms' within the video conference where students can be assigned in groups, as would be appropriate when students share their work and seek peer feedback. I also used the breakout rooms to meet individually with students and confer about their progress. The teacher is free to enter and leave these rooms as necessary.

Some points learnt through this online experience:

- After initially speaking to the class and explaining the aim of each lesson, put students in separate breakout rooms so that it is possible to go in and consult individually about model choices and provide hints for the students' analysis. As students work alone on their mirroring, there is no need to place the students in groups at this stage.

- For activities where students are required to show the original model online, such as a TED talk, students had great trouble with the screen share function of the video conferencing platforms. This is probably because as students mostly on the listening/passive end of university lectures there is no need to use such functions. As a workaround, students who had trouble played their TED talk on their smartphones and held it up to the camera on their computers. Simple but it worked!

- For the final presentation where the students present on their own original content, discourage the use of a narrated PowerPoint. Although some students like the structure that PowerPoint provides, it is a distraction from the visual element that the students should be providing with their body language and gestures. Also, the visual image of the student will be reduced to a tiny view at the bottom of the screen, not to mention the potential for screen share problems.

- Space limitations in many of the student's tiny apartments restricted movement and therefore overall body language. Understand this as a drawback of presenting online and take it into consideration when selecting an appropriate model. The other drawback is that the 'live' element of presenting in front of an audience is lost.

Whether the intention of conducting a mirroring project in class is to improve intelligibility or to improve public speaking skills, there are a number of advantages to conducting such a project as part of an English instruction class. Students display greater confidence after practising mirroring and this can probably be attributed to the fact that there is a clear model to follow and that they aren't working with their own material, at least until the final presentation stage. The class also focuses on only one distinct aspect of presentation – delivery – making the objectives clear and easy for students to follow. Additionally, although there are minor drawbacks, this style of instruction has proved to be compatible with teaching in a synchronous online format.

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The right question at the right time

Zoe Smith describes how she uses Socratic questions when teaching.

As part of my Master's in TESOL some 15 years ago, I audio-recorded two different teachers' classes as part of a module on discourse analysis. Of intrigue was that one teacher used a lot of regular questions but yielded very limited or shallow responses, while the other teacher's 'questioning' technique involved getting learners to complete the sentence that he started to utter, generating impressively rich responses. All of the questioning by the first teacher had seemed to have gone to waste. But maybe it isn't that questions themselves are useless. Perhaps it's more about knowing which questions to ask and when to pull them out of the hat. Cracking this is something that I still struggle with.

Critical thinking, Bloom's taxonomy, and aiming high

A few years after my MA research, the buzzword 'critical thinking' entered ELT. The buzzword became an underpinning behind many presentations, coursebooks, and syllabi. Bloom's taxonomy has been frequently referred to as *the* model of how critical thinking 'works'. First created in the 1950s, Bloom's taxonomy offers a hierarchical schematic of different types of cognitive input/output (see Figure 1). At the bottom of the hierarchy, 'remember' refers to learning information by rote. This can be achieved by drilling, rudimentary 'yes/no' questioning, or the dissemination of word lists for learners to memorize. Teachers have been encouraged to try and avoid or get their learners out of this supposed 'lower-order thinking.'
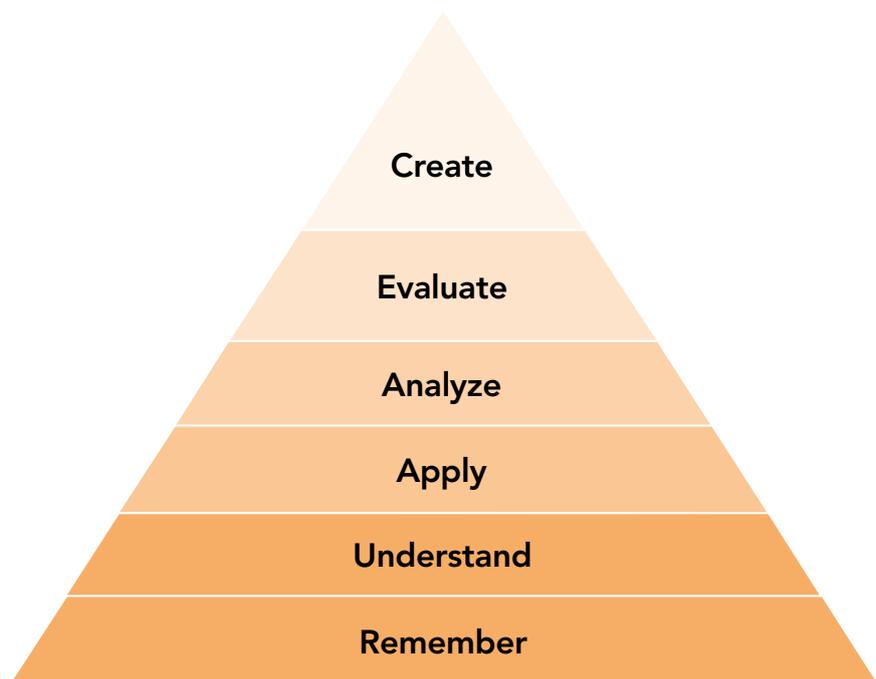

Figure 1. Bloom's taxonomy pyramid showing the progression from lower- to higher-order thinking skills.

Many English language teachers now include higher-order, free-thinking and creative activities in their classrooms in recognition of the need to foster greater autonomy and lateral thinking in problem-solving. These latter two skills become particularly important when learners move into a tertiary learning environment and no longer have a teacher standing in front of them all day long.

Another model, or rather, theory, that implicates the need for effective classroom questioning involves Krashen's i+1 input hypothesis (Krashen 1981) – the idea here being that we need to incrementally increase the level of language input/output so that learners can progress.

However, even for experienced teachers like myself, I find that when I am in the very busy moment of trying to keep twenty-plus individuals with varying English language skills all adequately engaged, I struggle to create the headspace to be able to think about what is the best question I can ask. I notice myself all too often resorting to the question 'Why do you think that?' and then just nodding and saying 'good' to all responses. Likewise, coursebooks don't tend to teach deep questioning. I come away wondering if my learners are being sufficiently

challenged or if I am simply very good at keeping them talking to fill time.

Socratic questions

It was after undertaking the reading for my Delta Module 3 that I came across a table in an article by Cheong and Cheung (2008) and had the idea that this table could be adapted into a convenient 'cheatsheet' to address the limited question repertoire.

Cheong and Cheung wanted to assess the degree of information processing by school pupils on an online discussion board – was it surface or in-depth processing? (echoing Bloom's hierarchy of thinking). As part of their discussion, they cite others who draw attention to the importance of good questioning techniques, for example, 'MacKnight … remarked that questions that focus on the fundamentals of thought and reasoning form the baseline of critical thinking' (Cheong & Cheung, 2008).

Cheong and Cheung reference Socratic questioning, an approach to questioning based on the ancient Greek philosopher, Socrates, and which has had an indelible impact on western scholarly thinking. Through careful question choice, assumptions and beliefs can be challenged and individuals can be encouraged to look at something from different perspectives and to broaden their understanding. Cheong and Cheung devised a table based on the list of *Socratic Questions* (n.d.) found on the Changing Minds website (www.changingminds.org). The purpose of their table was to provide question prompts that could be used to help learners develop richer online discussion.

Adapting both Cheong and Cheung's and the *Socratic Questions* list, the resulting list of questions (Table 1) can be displayed on the wall or taped to the back of a book for quick reference. All of these questions fulfil the *evaluate* and *analyze* bands of Bloom's hierarchy. The questions might look very advanced, but you could simplify some of them – 'Why are you saying that?' can become 'Why?' or 'Give me

What do you mean by?	Could you put it another way?
What are you assuming?	Is that always the case? What is the consequence of that assumption?
Can you give an example?	How solid is that example? Can you give another example?
How do you know that?	Could that be disproven?
What influences your perspective?	What would (name) say/think about this?
How does this relate to X topic?	How is it different from X topic? Can you make a connection to your own circumstances?
Is that an opinion or an academic stance?	How does your perspective influence your idea? What would someone who disagrees say?
What questions do we need to ask first?	How do we find the answers to those questions?
What do we already know about this?	How do we know this? What else is it important to know about this?

Table 1. Socratic questions: The questions in the second column can be follow-up questions to the questions in the first column.
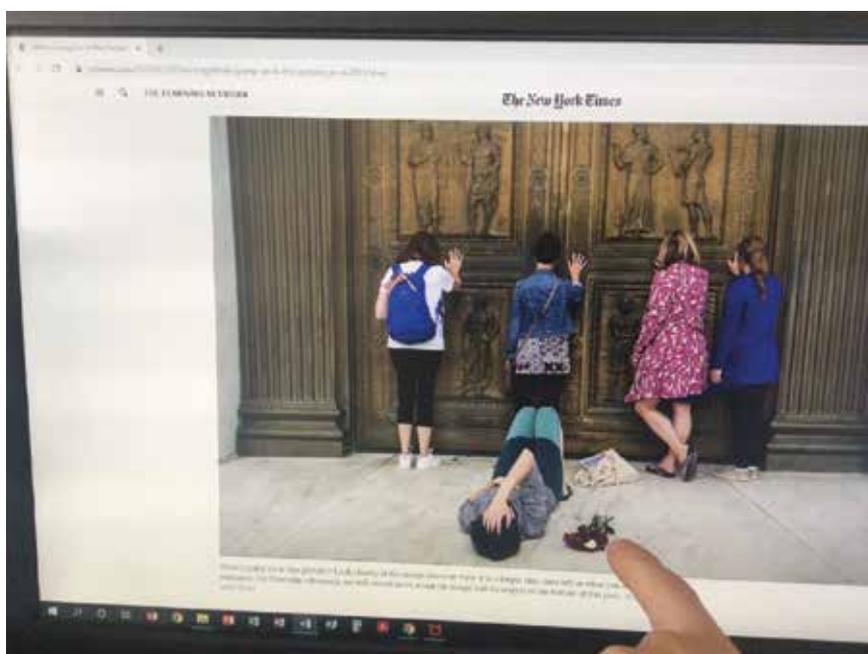
Figure 2. Probing into the real details of learners' beliefs and attitudes using *What's Going On in This Picture?*

one reason,' etc. The main point is that learners should be encouraged to expand on their answer to the extent that they elaborate on their thinking process as part of their explanation why they thought/said something. Others can be invited to help develop peers' ideas. With that, it's important to pre-empt any sense of individuals feeling 'attacked' by explaining this questioning approach.

A great entry point to using this table is in conjunction with displaying one of the photographs from *The New York Times'* 'What's Going On in This Picture?' webpage. Images of

curious scenes from around the world are posted here each week with the purpose of encouraging school-age children to discuss what they see via a comments thread. One example picture is shown in Figure 2.

Applying the Socratic questioning with a 'What's Going On in This Picture?' picture can form a lesson that introduces learners to the goal of formulating more effective questions. Such a lesson is applicable to both online and face-to-face classrooms, and could follow these steps:

■ Ask/Explain to the class why it's important to ask (different types of) questions.

- Re-cap on the difference between open-ended questions and closed questions.

- Elicit some open-ended questions and list these on the board/screen.

- Add some new questions to the list (refer to Table 1).

- If used, ensure learners understand words such as 'assumption,' 'perspective,' 'disproven.'

- Select one of the new questions and elicit: what type of information should the answer contain (e.g., a paraphrase, more detail, acknowledgement of limited understanding); actual example responses; when it might be appropriate to ask that question (e.g., when someone's idea is biased).

- Explain that the rest of the lesson will be about practising these questions.

- Display a photograph from 'What's Going On in This Picture?' and ask 'What's going on in this picture?'

- Ask follow-up questions in response to learner comments (see example below).

- Reveal the story behind the picture (an explanation is posted on the website several days after a new image is posted) and give feedback on the learner responses.

- Put learners into pairs/threes and give them a new picture to ask and answer questions about.

- Each group presents their picture and their ideas about the picture to the rest of the class.

Here is an example of a possible question–response exchange, using the photograph in Figure 2 with some of the Socratic questions from Table 1:

There could also be questioning around the woman lying on the floor – is she looking at something, or is she fainting? The significance of the roses and/or the colours of the flowers could also generate speculation. If the picture is very difficult to interpret, insert some extra clues when the discussion starts to quieten or if learners sound frustrated.

> I think this is in America—look at the flags on the backpack.
>
> Are you sure? Is there another explanation?
>
> They might be tourists in a tour group. The architecture is European style.
>
> How do you know that?
>
> There are columns/pillars. They are the doors of a church.
>
> Could that be disproven? Look more closely at the doors.
>
> They are all men, and they're talking. They are wearing ancient Greek or Roman clothes. I can't see any religious symbols. It's therefore not obvious if these represent religious scenes.

Eventually you can reveal the actual information behind the picture. In this example, in case you were wondering, the women are outside of the U.S. Supreme Court, mourning the passing of Ruth Bader Ginsburg. The actual answer can be compared with some of the responses that learners had given, and that any gaps in their interpretation can help them understand what information they need to have in order to give a fair representation of a topic. This can ultimately feed in to developing research skills.

Conclusion

Developing my own awareness of the effective use of questions has helped me identify where I can help both myself and my learners become better communicators. After having introduced Socratic questioning to my learners, I aim to re-use one question in each subsequent lesson. Trying to over-repeatedly force in all questions becomes inauthentic and leads to early fatigue. (Not all the questions in Table 1 would be applicable to all texts or images in any case.) Learners are, however, reminded at intervals that it's important for them – not just the teacher – to ask good questions. I include occasional activities that explicitly remind them of the taught questions. For example, I give each learner a sticky note with one question on it that they have to use during that class. These sticky notes can be recycled and re-distributed for the same purpose a few lessons later on. With online learning, it's also been really useful to be able to watch recordings and download transcripts of my lessons. By way of action research, I've been able to compare early discussions with later discussions and track the development of inquiry in both myself and my learners. It's great when I notice a learner using one of the new questions without any prompting.

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Teaching English

An Introduction to Evidence-Based Teaching in the English Language Classroom

Theory and Practice

Carol Lethaby, Russell Mayne and Patricia Harries

Do you want to learn more about the evidence, or lack of evidence, supporting common teaching strategies and procedures? *An Introduction to Evidence-Based Teaching in English Language Classroom* compiles the evidence in one place for you, rather than scattered across a variety of sources: online blogs, conference reports and disparate journal papers.

This practical and accessible resource begins by identifying what 'evidence-based teaching' is. It then outlines the key strategies, briefly describing how and why they are supported by evidence. Finally, it moves on to show the practical application of these strategies in ELT with concrete examples and activities.

This book is designed to be a supplement to any initial or in-service teacher education course as well as for teachers at any level who are interested in evidence-based teaching in English Language classes. You should read alongside core teacher training texts, in order to be able to examine common teaching practices.

Setting up an online book club

Morag McIntosh explains how and why she did this for her learners.

Have you ever wished that your English Language learners read more widely for pleasure, in English? Do you have learners who are feeling a sense of isolation and boredom due to the Covid-19 pandemic? If these situations sound familiar to you, as they did to me, you can read here how I took steps to solve these problems, by setting up an online book club for learners.

The problem

In my school, along with possibly the majority of language schools, reading for pleasure is not a priority, with more of a focus on grammar and vocabulary acquisition, in addition to exam skills and strategies. Teachers do not tend to incorporate extensive reading into their classes.

Our school had about thirty graded readers available for students to borrow. They paid a deposit and could borrow as many books as they wanted. Some teachers reported that students would sometimes go and take a book. However, there was no one available to guide the students on book selection, and the service was very underused. I'm sure this is a problem which resonates with many of you.

My research

As a result of some research that I recently carried out into the benefits of extensive reading programs as part of my DipTesol, I was inspired to start up and run an online book club for English language learners during lockdown.

> **"Students reported that they would be encouraged and motivated to participate in a teacher-led programme with academic tasks and feedback."**

I believed that a great deal more could be done to promote the academic benefits of extensive reading to the students and to encourage and motivate them to participate in this activity. According to Jeremy Harmer (2007), 'it is not enough to tell our students to read a lot. We need to offer appropriate materials, guidance, tasks and facilities such as permanent or portable libraries of books' (Harmer, 2007: 283).

I was impressed to read that 'extensive reading is a highly important part of balanced learning in a language course...brings the biggest improvement you can make compared to other changes because it makes the biggest proficiency gains' (Nation, 2019: 195-196), and I set out to investigate barriers which tended to prevent students from participating in extensive reading. My goal was to discover what features they felt would motivate and encourage them to use extensive reading, then to devise a suitable programme.

My research uncovered that there was a low tendency to read in either L1 or L2. Texts selected were predominantly shorter and more factual in nature. Although a limited number of strategies, such as using the context, prediction and background knowledge were used, lack of time and low motivation were barriers. Awareness of the benefits of extensive reading was limited, and there was lack of knowledge about locating and selecting suitable material. Students reported that they would be encouraged and motivated to participate in a teacher-led programme with academic tasks and feedback.

Unfortunately, at this point in my research the Covid-19 pandemic hit, and I did not have a chance to implement my extensive reading program at the school. However, as lockdown one was swiftly followed by lockdown two, and learning online became the 'new normal', I decided that this would be the ideal opportunity to set up an online version of the book club which I had envisioned.

Reasons for setting up the online book club

My book club was set up with two distinct purposes in mind: educational and social.

Day and Bamford (1998) state that extensive reading helps learners with sentence structure and that it improves reading and writing proficiency, oral skills and vocabulary, motivation and positive affect (Day and Bamford, 1998: 32-39). I was in no doubt of the educational benefits for the students. However, a second, and equally important purpose became increasingly clear, as the time went by. Many of these students were experiencing a profound sense of loneliness and isolation, as they were cut off from their families and trapped in their accommodation, unable to go out and interact with others. The only communication they had in English was their daily Zoom lessons.

In a study of 2010 respondents in China, Wang *et al* (2020) concluded that, 'During the initial phase of the COVID-19 outbreak in China, more than half of the respondents rated the psychological impact as moderate-to-severe, and about one-third reported moderate-to-severe anxiety' (Wang *et al*, 2020: 1729). I saw my book club as being a perfect way of ensuring the students had additional opportunities for social interaction, online engagement in English with other students and meaningful communication in a safe and supportive environment, during these difficult circumstances.

What I did

My book club is mixed-level, which is challenging to manage, but was the most practical solution, due to the unpredictability of student numbers. It meets each Monday afternoon, on Zoom, for one hour. At the first meeting the students were given advice on how to select a book that would provide the correct level of challenge for them – neither too easy nor too difficult. They were shown the five-finger rule (as explained on the Reading Rockets website) to help them to do this.

The students are then introduced to a wide range of online books from which to make their selection. The Extensive Reading Foundation, founded by Dr Richard R. Day and Julian Bamford in 2004, is an invaluable resource, which has a very useful grading scale, as well as a comprehensive and searchable database of graded readers, which can be downloaded.

The actual books which I use are selected from the wonderful selection of graded readers available online from Extensive Reading Central, where the students are assisted to search for a book of interest to them, by title, by level or by category. Students do not need to register, but if they do, it is free and gives them the ability to right-click on words for the meanings, and to complete quizzes on completion of the books.

The task set for the students each week is to read a chapter of their book by the next meeting of the club and to complete an activity sheet, which is either emailed to them, or shared as a pdf in the chat box. The activities on these sheets, which can be made by the teacher or found online, help to track their progress and give them motivation for completing the chapter.

At the weekly book club meetings, the students discuss their reading in small groups. Sometimes these will be mixed-level and sometimes same-level. In addition, they have weekly input and activities which focus on one particular reading strategy each week.

One example activity that I have successfully used is to do a timed reading in pairs, to help them focus on increasing their reading speed. A short section of an appropriate text is selected and the students compete in pairs to complete this before their partner. The winner must give a summary of the text, to prove they actually read it.

This book club is intended to be a fun social activity to motivate the students and increase their interest in reading for pleasure. It is important to make sure that the format is suitable for students joining and just popping in from time to time, as this maximises student participation. If they feel it is ok to miss a week and still attend the next time, they are more likely to come back.

So far, the book club has been successful, as it has proved popular and been well-attended. It really doesn't take a lot of work to set it up and, in my opinion, it is well worth the effort. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend that you try something similar in your own context, as it can be easily adapted for all levels, ages and situations and these books are all freely available.

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Why we should stop encouraging students to 'study' for that big language exam

Charlie Taylor explains why we should be concentrating on practice not study.

I t is likely that language tests will exist for as long as language teachers do, and while most teachers would probably prefer that their students be motivated purely by a love of the spoken and written word, we must accept the fact that, for many, the ultimate goal is to get a high grade on some standardized test or another. So, like it or not, if we want to help our students achieve their learning goals, we must be able to prepare them for tests.

Of course, different types of tests will require different strategies. Broadly speaking, there are two main types of exam that a student is likely to be faced with. First, there is the materials-based exam, in which students need to demonstrate that they have mastered whatever materials have been presented to them in class, be they vocabulary words, grammatical points, or passages of text. The second type of language test, like the TOEFL, the TOEIC, or the IELTS, evaluates a student's proficiency. These two different types of test call for radically different approaches to preparation. Studying will improve student outcomes on the first type, but will provide little benefit to students who are preparing for the latter.

Studying

A student who is preparing for a materials-based test will need to study. Knowledge has been disseminated by the teacher, the textbook, or other course materials, and a student must commit it to memory in order to succeed on the exam. Such evaluations are essentially memory tests. They do not assess, nor do they significantly contribute to, a student's ability to use the language. For this reason, they are largely a waste of time, and their presence in language classes leads to poor teaching practices and slow student progress. Nonetheless, they continue to be an almost ubiquitous feature of language classrooms around the world.

Major language exams, on the other hand, tend to be proficiency tests. The 'material' to be 'covered'—the comprehensive vocabulary and syntax of the English language—is so vast, that it is well beyond the capability of any human to consciously commit to memory. However, many students will try to prepare for these exams by studying because this is a strategy that has served them well when preparing for the materials-based evaluations of their language classes. Students engaged in the Sisyphean task of studying for a proficiency test are easily recognizable by their bloodshot eyes, lack of joie-de-vivre, and the 'Learn 10 Billion English Words for the TOEIC' books they tote around with them wherever they go. Unfortunately, they will invariably meet with failure and frustration.

To understand why studying is the wrong way to prepare for a proficiency test, we have to look at the nature of second language acquisition. A student who studies a language is basically learning facts about the language. These students learn the meta-language of the grammatical structures and memorize the definitions of vocabulary words. For the small minority of students who are interested in linguistics, this can be a stimulating pursuit, but there is no evidence that this sort of conscious learning improves a student's proficiency. Knowledge acquisition does not equal language acquisition. Teaching a student grammar and expecting them to be able to communicate in English is like teaching somebody how an internal combustion engine works and expecting them to be able to drive a car.

Any grammar-teaching advocates who have made it this far in the article will no doubt disagree. Indeed, there is some evidence that explicit grammar instruction can bring about short-term improvements in specific grammatical patterns, although

it is not clear whether the long-term negative effects of such instruction outweigh the limited benefits. In any case, arguing for a zero-grammar approach is beyond the scope of this article.

Meanwhile, students who memorize vocabulary words will forget most of them, and the few they remember, they will not be able to use appropriately in context. Using your conscious mind to try to remember anything is an onerous chore. Imagine trying to memorize ten telephone numbers a day for a month. How many of these would you remember after three months? The conscious human mind is simply not built to process that sort of volume of discreet factoids.

Practising

So, given that studying for a proficiency test is ineffective, should students simply give up on preparing for their exams? Absolutely not; students should prepare for proficiency tests by improving their proficiency. Thus, preparing for such a test should look very much like simply working to acquire a language. Students should harness the power of the unconscious mind to do this because the unconscious is as brilliant at acquiring languages as the conscious mind is terrible at rote memorization. Students need to develop the mindset that they are practising (acquiring a skill) rather than studying (acquiring knowledge).

The term 'practise' is used with a caveat here. There are different types of practice, and they are not all equal. A student who parrots phrases after a teacher is technically practising a language, but such practice is unlikely to bring about any significant increase in proficiency.

Furthermore, 'practice tests', of the type that are popular in test-prep classes, are also of limited value. This is not to say that students should never do a practice test when preparing for a proficiency test. Some time should be spent studying the format of the test and learning some strategies. Avoiding surprises and building confidence will no doubt lead to a small improvement in results, but it is nowhere near as significant as the improvement that will come from improving proficiency.

The type of practice that will benefit the student most is that which gets students to engage with the language. It involves a lot of input which the student understands and finds stimulating, and it encourages students to focus on the meaning rather than the form. Having engaging conversations in the target language is great because it allows the learner and the teacher to negotiate meaning. However, not all students have unlimited access to a patient conversation partner. More universally accessible to students is pleasure reading, which can be done independently, and allows the subconscious mind to acquire vocabulary and grammatical patterns naturally and in context.

> "Teaching a student grammar and expecting them to be able to communicate in English is like teaching somebody how an internal combustion engine works and expecting them to be able to drive a car."

How can practitioners and policymakers help?

The challenge for teachers trying to convince students to improve their skill rather than their knowledge is that language acquisition is, by nature, time consuming; whereas many students are, by nature, busy. They often cling to ineffective methods if they believe them to be a shortcut to higher grades. Language students often have strong beliefs about how best to prepare for an exam, and

these beliefs do not usually stem from a careful evaluation of the research in the field of language acquisition. More likely they are based on exposure to poor practices in language classrooms.

One of the culprits responsible for these poor practices is materials-based testing. Not only do such tests waste countless hours that could be better used improving students' proficiency, they also inevitably lead to washback, meaning teachers are forced to teach to the test, and students are forced to study for them. Because studying is necessary for a materials-based test, their presence in language classes can mislead students into believing that studying material is a viable—or indeed the only—way to improve one's language skills. For these reasons, policymakers should avoid requiring such evaluations.

Meanwhile, given where the weight of public opinion stands, teachers who advocate practice over study must be prepared to present sceptics, both colleagues and students, with clear empirical evidence supporting their position. There is no shortage of research available for free in open-source refereed journal articles on the internet, and language teachers should take some time to familiarize themselves with it so that their students do not have to. After all, preparing for a language exam is time-consuming enough without becoming an expert in applied linguistics.

To sum up, the only way to significantly improve one's grade on a proficiency test is to improve one's proficiency, and this is best done by practising the language, not studying it.

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The book I always refer to

Jason Anderson chooses his go-to title.

Training Foreign Language Teachers: A Reflective Approach (1991)

Michael J Wallace
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
ISBN: 9870521 356541

Model	Example
1. The craft model A 'master teacher', as an 'expert in the practice of the "craft"' (p. 6), trains 'apprentices' in the techniques, traditions and tricks of the trade.	Short initial training courses (e.g. for the Cambridge CELTA) are often primarily craft oriented.
2. The applied science model 'Students' learn about what science (e.g. SLA research, sociocultural theory) tells us about teaching, and then go and implement an approach based on these findings in the classroom (Schön's 'technical rationality').	Many MA TESOL qualifications tend to follow this model.
3. The reflective model The teacher(learner) engages in a reflective cycle that draws upon both 'received knowledge' (e.g. from applied science) and 'experiential knowledge' (e.g. from their own teaching practice) to lead iteratively to professional competence.	A well-developed in-service programme.

Table 1 Wallace's three models for teacher education

It took me some time to choose this book, not because I don't have a 'go-to' book, but because I have so many. If I had chosen to write this piece with a focus on professional expertise, it probably would have been Schön's *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983). If my interest had been educational theory, Bruner's *The Culture of Education* (1996) might have got the call up, and if I were writing with my researcher hat on, I might have chosen Dörnyei's *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics* (2007) as my most regularly referenced title. However, given that the majority of my own work today falls mainly under the gamut of teacher education, I've chosen Wallace's *Training Foreign Language Teachers: A Reflective Approach* (1991) probably because it's the one that helped me greatly when I began helping other teachers to learn how to teach (or not). And it's also the one I tend to recommend to those who are interested in becoming teacher educators, even today, 30 years after it was written.

Wallace's three models for teacher education

Let's get one negative out of the way to start with – the title. It seems to me that it should be called 'Educating foreign language teachers'. This is because – as Wallace presents clearly and simply – teacher education is much more than *just*, or *simply* about 'training' teachers (see Freeman, 1989). He begins the book, in the first chapter, by making a distinction between three models for teacher education, summarised in Table 1.

Today, there are other models that we might add to this trichotomy (discussed below). However, these three are still probably the most prominent in teacher

education, and still very influential on the practices of those that undergo them. To modify Lortie's (1975) observation that we tend to teach like we were taught, it seems to me that the majority of us, when we get into teacher education, tend to try to teach others to teach like we were taught to teach. Those of us who underwent the 'CELTA-DELTA' type route will often adopt a craft model, including 'demonstration lessons', 'feedback' on 'TP' and practical 'workshops' on specific skills, such as checking understanding, giving instructions and correcting errors. Those who completed MA TESOL programmes will often include 'lectures' and (invariably written) 'assignments' on their own 'programmes', followed by a 'practicum' to implement the learning, often rather detached from the classroom where the received knowledge may or may not have been imparted. For those of us who reach the point of realising that neither of these models, on its own, is likely to be appropriate or adequate for the majority of teachers, Wallace's reflective model builds wisely on the strengths of both.

While Wallace was heavily influenced by Schön's writing on practitioner reflection (1983; 1987), his reflective model departs from Schön's primary reliance on 'reflection-in-action' as the core means of professional learning (see Anderson, 2019) and manages to achieve a useful synergy between the two prior approaches and Schön's – in this sense, I think, it is a more complete one, and has underpinned both in-service programmes and pre-service short courses that I've implemented on several occasions successfully (based on both feedback and outcomes).

The core of the book

In chapters 2, 3 and 3, Wallace goes on to discuss aspects of his model in depth. In chapter two he discusses how received knowledge can be effectively imparted (e.g. practising what you preach, encouraging deep learning). In chapter 3 he provides detailed guidance on different 'delivery' approaches, contrasting 'lecture mode' and 'group mode' critically, offering guidance and cautions for both, and emphasising the importance of variety in longer-term and formal education programmes. Then, in
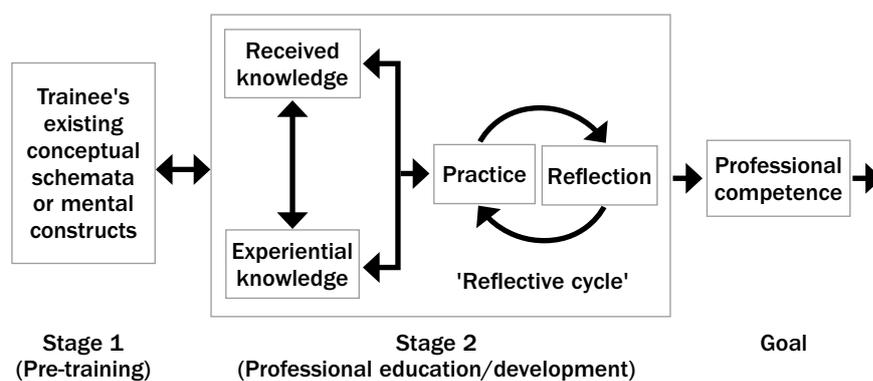

Figure 1 The Reflective Practice model of professional education/development (from Wallace 1991)

chapter 4, he walks us chronologically through the stages of his reflective model (see Figure 1).

He goes into useful detail on what he calls a 'pre-training' stage that provides time and opportunities for teachers (pre-service or in-service) to explore their current beliefs, schemata and knowledge bases – all good advice that I have drawn upon on teacher education programmes myself (see Figure 2). As Borg (e.g. 2018) and others have observed, based on sound evidence, these beliefs are of critical importance to how we teach and need to be surfaced and explored in any useful teacher education programme.

In chapters 5 and 6, Wallace looks in detail at two key aspects of teaching practice in teacher education that are all too often either oversimplified or overlooked today: lesson observation and microteaching. In chapter 5, he looks at several key parameters of lesson observation (e.g. data source, medium of recall, 'interpreters') to unearth why getting this right is central to effective teacher support during what is inevitably a stressful and complex event for the teacher involved. And in chapter 6 he unpicks microteaching, looking at the manifold ways it can be used to gradually increase the risk factor for pre-service teachers as they begin teaching practice to build confidence and understanding simultaneously. Contrast this with the 'in-at-the-deep-end', 'drag and drop' approach so often used on short training courses that can lead to more damage than learning at this critical stage in a potential teacher's career.

The next two chapters of the book focus on supervision and assessment in

Figure 2 Materials for teacher education that address teachers' beliefs about learning (from Anderson & Kamaluddin, 2015, used with permission).

teacher education, chapter 7 looking particularly at lesson observation and 'feedback' from the perspective of line managers (e.g. department head, director of studies) or practicum supervisors, drawing wisely on Freeman's (1982) earlier work in this area, and ultimately recommending, where possible, a move from prescriptive supervision to collaboration within which greater teacher reflection may scaffold more extensive and sustainable learning. The rather brief chapter 8 looks at assessment, offering a useful range of tools beyond the almost monolithic written discursive assignments that tend to dominate university teacher education programmes. Many university teacher educators around the world would do well to remind themselves of the options available – assessment doesn't have to involve setting and 'marking' such assignments.

The book ends with a look at course design for teacher education, drawing upon a case study of a B.Ed. type course that considers the needs of non-native teacher participants and could be useful for national pre-service programmes to prepare primary and secondary teachers. Whilst much of this chapter is fairly common sense to anyone with experience in formal education (e.g. aims and objectives, course design, etc.), the foci on progression and coherence (pp. 151-155) are useful: these important features are often lost as courses that are initially well designed get picked apart, reordered and jam-packed full of the varying, and sometimes not so helpful, input of different stakeholders.

Evaluation and critique

Unlike so many books on teacher education available today, which are either too idiosyncratic, too opaque in meaning, overly opinionated or simply one-sided in their promotion of a particular approach, Wallace is very good at steering a steady course between the options available, essentialising and conveying the ideas of others for the reader without being afraid to replace them with more pragmatic alternatives at times, based on his own extensive experience.

Possible criticisms might relate to his attempt to deal with both pre-service and in-service teacher education simultaneously throughout the book, which causes ambiguity at times, and, from today's perspective, his focus on learning styles in Chapter 2 would likely be rejected. However, even here, his primary focus on deep versus surface learning and his choice to move the discussion on to learning strategies is further evidence of his wisdom; both have stood the test of time. Finally, his 3-model approach seems to be heavily influenced by Mary M. Kennedy's earlier (1987) article in mainstream teacher education which promotes the same three models alongside a fourth case study model, yet she does not receive acknowledgement, even as a reference. It may be a co-incidence, of course, but including this thought allows me to promote her piece also – well worth a read!

Final thoughts

Looking back on a book that was written 30 years ago before I even started my career, I still find it a useful point of reference. However, one model that I would add onto his three, if I could, is a teacher research model – something that has gained in prominence in teacher education since the turn of the century, with action research (e.g. Burns, 2009; Smith & Rebolledo, 2018) and exploratory practice (e.g. Hanks, 2017) both becoming prominent. Lesson study (e.g. Rappleye & Komatsu, 2017) might also fall under this umbrella. These constitute a growing resource base of 'bottom up' approaches to teacher education that were comparatively rare when the book was written.

What impress me most about this book are Wallace's extensive practical awareness and his 'principled eclecticism' (Widdowson, 1979), something that we all may benefit from in an era when models, methods and mantras for teacher education can be so dangerously circulated, liked and adopted across widely varying contexts around the world through the click of a mouse button. Referring to less principled practices, Wallace notes in his concluding remarks to the book,

'*what is truly constraining is to be the prisoner of unexamined traditions of teacher education which may never have had any real professional validity, or which may have lost whatever validity they once had through the passage of time*' (Wallace, 1991, p. 164).

I am happy to reflect that the **same** passage of time has not lessened the validity of his book for me.

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Reviews

Inside Online Language Teaching: Conversations about the Future That Became The Present

Ross Thorburn
Independently published (2021)
See page 88 for details
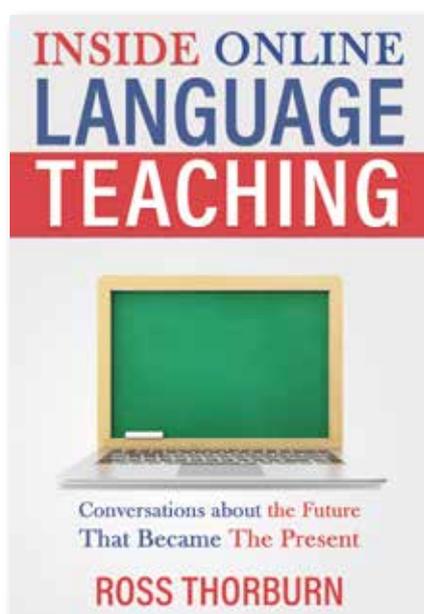
Like many readers recently, I've been overwhelmed by articles and online events, all promising to give me that one tool to transform my online teaching. There is also a wealth of related books by gurus such as Lindsay Clandfield and Nicky Hockly, as well as Russell Stannard's Teacher Training Videos. Did we need more?

Inside Online Language Teaching is a series of conversations and is refreshingly different. I wish I'd had it 12–18 months ago, yet its beauty lies in each interviewee's immediate response to what we've all been trying to do. The book started out as part of a podcast from TEFL Training Institute of 15–minute episodes with scripts, which have been edited for this book. I thought I'd done pretty well online so far, but this slim volume is full of tried-and-tested, common-sense ideas from people who were already experienced online before the pandemic struck. The focus is largely on what you can do online, not what you can't; this positivity is a shining beacon throughout.

Ross Thorburn has been living in China for the past 15 years, and while much of his experience is local, it also extends to teaching, training and supporting managers in ELT further afield, as well as to curriculum design and assessment. As the podcast attests, he is certainly more than qualified to delve into all these areas.

Some of his discussion partners may be familiar: Russell Stannard, Marek Kiczkowiak, Jake Wheddon. Several chapters focus on teaching younger learners, often in China, and though this may be a far cry from many of the contexts we work in, much of the advice is transferable; I've found ready-to-use nuggets in every chapter.

The first part looks at how to help students get the most out of online classes. Chapters 1, 2 and 4 are good places to start, dealing with the early-stage practicalities of moving online. It might seem obvious to remember to help orientate learners to a new platform, and teach them associated IT phrases. It's also useful, online, to remember to focus on meaningful and authentic classroom interaction, and exploit what we have around us at home. Students also need 'time out' online. A wealth of ideas is included for both teachers and students on how to manage breakout rooms effectively.

In chapter 3, Morag McIntosh reminds us that asking students to share something exciting about their weekend, when they've been stuck inside, just doesn't cut it online. Instead, she has encouraged teens to make a video on their isolation walk, share and watch these in class, and engage other students in a Q+A. She's also done virtual cultural tours and quizzes. What a treat!

Chapter 5 turns the tables, and Ross is interviewed about his MA research on meaningful communication in one-to-one classes with low-level young learners. As a keen one-to-one teacher, despite teaching mostly teens and adults, I had high expectations. Ross had analysed the effectiveness of four tasks used variously by a number of teachers. I expected success to be related to the quality of the task itself, but in fact meaningful communication related far more to teacher interaction (questions; responses) than task design. A useful read.

Russell's extensive experience shines through and Chapter 6 focuses on promoting learner autonomy, with numerous practical ideas on how this can be implemented – from teaching phrases about online tools, to how students can take control.

The following two sections look, respectively, at motivation online, and language learning at home with technology. Both stress developing rapport by opening up teaching and learning spaces to share online. The first does this through sharing interests, while the second highlights the benefits of involving parents. I'm not convinced that 'showing' my granny or hamster would work with my adults or in Europe dragging parents to the screen when they're desperately trying to hold down their own job during 'school hours' would be a good idea; in study-driven China, however, parental support in language learning is surely a must for 3 year olds. My takeaway here is the

use of online tools to help engage more introvert students, and address differentiation.

The final three sections move outside the classroom and focus on apps, setting up online courses, and teacher observation. The first of these will be useful for anyone promoting app use for language learning. It refers to Kathy Hirsh-Pasek's four pillars of learning, and how these should be included in any good app: minds-on learning, engagement, meaningful learning and social interactions.

Readers of the next section will benefit from Marek Kiczkowiak's experience of setting up online courses. From materials design on synchronous and asynchronous courses, to platform use and marketing, this must be the shortest route to having a go yourself!

The last part promotes the benefits of teacher development using recorded video lessons for observation, rather than rather relying on memory. We know how invaluable peer observation is, yet how rarely it happens, but the ideas here take this to a new level, also suggesting how to provide more effective feedback online.

While, personally, I would have liked to read more on adult one-to-one classes, perhaps within EAP and BE contexts, the book does do what it says on the tin, and each carefully-structured chapter is followed by a Top Tips and Takeaways section, and discussion questions. A four-page glossary is a bonus (items are unfortunately not hyperlinked from the main text in the e-book version), as is the detailed index. Having such an overview in relatively few pages (140) is a treat.

What I especially like, throughout, is the 'chat-over-coffee' style used, and the positive approach Ross adopts. He also describes how much of what we're learning online is beginning to have positive effects back in face-to-face classes, in China. Let's hope that has knock-on effects out west too!

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A Lexicon for ELT Professionals

Diane Nicholls
ELT Teacher 2 Writer (2020)
See page 88 for details

I'm *lorem ipsum*-ed out. This phrase is all over the PowerPoints I've been editing and for ages I've wondered what it means. Now I know: this is 'filler text', used to reserve the space where the correct wording will be placed later. Thanks to Diane Nicholls, I've learned that it's part of a much longer phrase and, although based on Latin, is basically meaningless. It's one of 500+ headwords in 'A Lexicon for ELT Professionals.'

Remember ABC's 1982 album The Lexicon of Love? This slim (156 pages) compendium isn't about love, but it's written by someone with a love of all things word. Scores of us in ELT, whether in publishing or in teaching, will identify with the author when she says: 'I've always loved languages and language learning and spent much of my childhood inventing new languages and reading dictionaries' (page 5). And talking of reading dictionaries, if you didn't realise that '*widow*', '*orphan*', '*gutter*', '*cold reader*' and '*rider*' have special meaning in the publishing world, let the Lexicon enlighten you.

From a languages background and having worked extensively on corpora, learner- and native-speaker dictionaries and specialist glossaries, Nicholls now works as an editor, project manager, freelance lexicographer/linguist and admits to enjoying the business of corralling words and 'trying to marshal them into some sort of order while secretly admiring their slipperiness' (page 6).

Thankfully, she has 'marshalled' items from a 324,000-word corpus, based on all the modules in the *ELT Teacher to Writer* list, into this 'compilation of what we talk about when we talk about ELT' (page 6), while stressing that it is not a definitive list and that the 500+ items are naturally subject to evolution and change, as in any industry. I hazard a guess that a future edition might cover such terms as (non)native-speaker, translanguaging, mediation and ERT (emergency remote teaching).

But for now, dear teflers, editors, writers: do you know your cloze from your gapfill? Your EAL from your EAP? Look to the Lexicon for answers. In the meantime, test yourself with some MCQs. (Answers at the end of the article.)

1. In publishing, a user path (e.g. Level 3 > Unit 3 > Vocabulary 1 > Activity 2) is known as …
   a) a branch
   b) a breadcrumb
   c) a bridge

2. In publishing, a pre-publication book sample used to promote a book is …
   a) the blad
   b) the bleed
   c) the blurb

3. In phonology, the linking of consonant sound to vowel sound is called …
   a) assimilation
   b) elision
   c) catenation

4. In assessment, the direct and indirect influence of tests/exams on teaching methods is …
   a) the washback effect
   b) the backwash effect
   c) both of the above

5. In materials and resources, PARSNIPS are …

a) coursebooks that are outdated
b) topics that are deemed taboo
c) worksheets that can be cut up

These are just some of the items listed in the book, which is divided into two sections: section one is an alphabetical list of headwords and definitions running from A/W (*artwork*) to ZPD (*zone of proximal development*). Section two covers the same headwords grouped by theme (the broad area of ELT they belong to). You can thus dip in to Assessment, Language, Materials and Resources, Methodology, Organisation (e.g. British Council, TESOL, Trinity), Pedagogy, Pronunciation, Publishing, Skills and Learning to check where an item belongs.

When I started out in TEFL back in 1987, on a CELTA and a month of being bamboozled by new terminology ('It's *elicit*, not *illicit* vocabulary.'; 'We pre-teach to *activate schemata*'), my then go-to references were Swan and Harmer. This type of lexicon would have been useful back then while I got my head around some high-frequency ELT terminology beyond just language and coursebooks. Years later, as an oral examiner for Cambridge, I had to acquaint myself with 'descriptors', 'rubrics', and the bewildering 'suprasegmentals' (aka 'prosodic features'), all of which feature heavily in assessment material and which Nicholls covers in this guide.

This leads me to the book's coverage. The stock terms I met on CELTA thirty-three years ago are here, along with exponents that reflect current pedagogy and industry preoccupations: the flipped classroom, English as a lingua franca, spiky profiles, virtual learning environments, English Medium Instruction, blended learning. The Cambridge exams (previously acronymed or initialised as KET, PET, FCE, CAE and CPE) are listed, reflecting their recent name change to Cambridge English: Key; Preliminary; First; Advanced and Proficiency. The one anomaly in the book is the inclusion of BULATS, the

language skills test for business and industry, which was 'officially retired' in December 2019 (but no doubt still alive at the time Nicholls was compiling the entries).

Given the wealth of familiar and new terms, who exactly is the book for? Who are the ELT professionals of the title? The Lexicon is one of a host of newish titles in a series from ELT Teacher 2 Writer, who publish paperbacks and ebooks that develop materials-writing skills. This book, says Nicholls, is aimed at teachers creating materials for their own classes, new or veteran ELT writers, designers and researchers in the publishing sector and, increasingly, software engineers or digital developers who need to understand the terminology as they work to create online content. Her aim is to provide clear definitions; there is no judgment here of teaching approaches or discussion of contemporary lexis or non-standard grammar. We are to treat the book purely as a dictionary and not as a critique of, say, multiple intelligences theory or Dogme.

While I am now pretty well-versed in the language of teaching, methodology and assessment, my own experience of the publishing industry only goes as far as having had commissioning editors, and knowing more widespread terms like house style guide, glossary and proofs. The Lexicon introduces us to specialised yet high-frequency items like *kerning* (the amount of space between letters), *gold master* (final version software pre-manufacture and distribution) and the intriguing *orphan* (the last line of a paragraph when it appears alone at the top of a column or page). I believe these and others like them are the stalwarts of ELT publishing that writers and editors know, just as syntax, phoneme and scaffolding are familiar terms for classroom teachers.

Having once been a novice in a staffroom of old hands, I feel that this book would be a useful tool for new teachers thrown in at the deep end in language schools and colleges and

having to quickly get to grips with placement testing, the CEFR, Can-do statements and learning-management systems. It's also a very quick intro to those professional bodies like Cambridge, Pearson, Trinity, IATEFL, and the products and services they offer.

This little gem should be given out at the start of initial training courses, along with a notebook and a pen, or kept on the staffroom shelf, and it is a handy guide for anyone entering the world of ELT materials writing to pick up and keep on their desk. What's nice is that, on the last page, Nicholls gives an email address and invites us to add our own terms and help build the next edition. As there's currently no entry under Q, how about it?

Quiz answers:

1. B A *breadcrumb* (or *breadcrumb trail*) is a series of stages, showing a user the path they took to get where they are in a website or application. Clicking at each stage takes them back to the previous page they visited.

2. A (*Bleed* is also a publishing term, meaning ink that prints beyond the edge of a page)

3. C (may also be known as *linking*)

4. C

5. B The acronym refers to politics, alcohol, religion, sex, narcotics, '-isms' (such as atheism, racism), pork and smoking.

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Conversation Strategies and Communicative Competence

Christian Jones
Candlin & Mynard (2021)
See page 88 for details
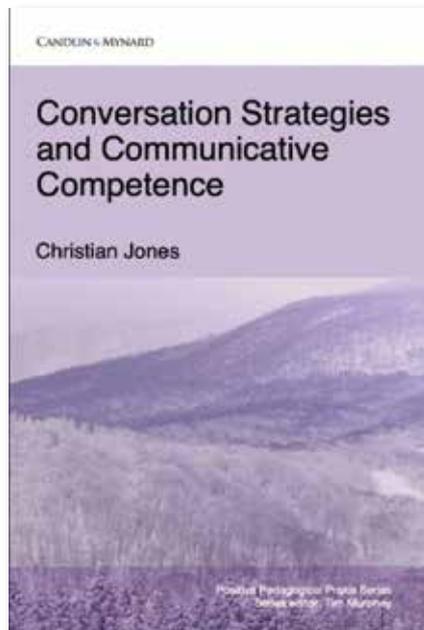
Christian Jones' latest book, (2021) is published by and is part of the *Positive Pedagogical Praxis* series, the aim of which is to help create more profound learning. Jones' book does indeed give the reader a more profound insight into conversation strategies as he follows the novel approach of examining the same subject from various different angles: each of the five chapters tackles the subject of conversation strategies from a different perspective.

In the first chapter, 'what are conversation strategies and why teach them' Jones situates the teaching of conversation strategies firmly in the communicative teaching context. Conversation strategies are defined and this provides a crucial foundation for remaining chapters. He also gives a brief history of the term 'communicative competence' which was first coined by Dell Hymes in 1972. The subsequent four chapters are all self-contained research studies and Jones examines conversation strategies from a corpus perspective (chapter 2), a materials perspective (chapter 3), a mixed methods perspective (chapter 4) and finally, an action research perspective (chapter 5).

Chapter 2 examines the phrases, 'stuff', 'yeah', 'what do you think' and 'and also' in two different corpora, one focused on English language learners and another created using ELF conversations. Jones then analyses how these phrases are used by the different groups of speakers. Although focusing on only four words/phrases may seem like a rather narrow focus, by limiting the scope, he is able to drill down and give detailed information about how each of the terms are used. For example, he notes that whereas 'yeah' is mainly used to show agreement at lower levels, among higher level speakers it is also used to show good listenership. For B1 learners a 'yeah' may simply be used to 'buy time' (p. 45). By showing us the procedure he uses to examine these terms, Jones hopes that teachers can better account for how proficient learners and ELF speakers actually use the language and incorporate contextualised examples into lesson materials.

In chapter three Jones reports on a study in which he asked teachers to evaluate the usefulness and feasibility of materials relating to conversation strategies. This chapter includes samples materials for teaching these strategies. The fourth chapter looks at mixed method study in an EFL context. In practical terms, this meant a more traditional A/B test with one group of students being exposed to explicit instruction and another (control) group not. The participants were then tested at the end of the intervention to see how much a difference the explicit instruction in conversation strategies made. Results of the pre-test were compared with results of the post-test showing the group taught explicitly about conversation strategies performed significantly better than those who were not. An interesting artefact of when the research was carried out was that the normal delayed post-test was not possible due to Covid-19.

The final chapter reports on a piece of action research undertaken in an EFL context. Jones attempts to discover what common conversation topics are among students and how useful they find the conversation strategies. The book closes with implications for research (p.165) and for teaching (p. 163). Here Jones suggests that teachers should focus on how conversations really happen rather than how they are often presented in materials, noting that spoken and written language differ and that these differences should be respected.

What this all amounts to is a detailed and thorough treatment of conversation strategies including corpus data, teacher views of materials, students' views of the strategies and research into the effectiveness of teaching the strategies.

A question with books of this type is whether or not they are intended for teachers or for researchers. The *positive pedagogical praxis* series is designed to be written in a teacher-friendly way and that is certainly the case with this book. It is a slim work and is written in a very accessible style. Where statistics are necessarily included, they are generally passed over as briefly as possible and are not necessary to understanding the chapter. There are numerous extracts from diaries and feedback showing the opinions of teachers and students.

The book is largely accessible to teachers and jargon-free though it was not entirely clear how the phrase '….and that kind of stuff' belonged to the category 'taking account of others'. Another teacher also seemed to struggle with the terminology noting (p. 73) that they were not sure how using 'well' and 'in fact' 'connects to the idea of managing your turn in conversation'. However, these are, no doubt, established terms rather than the author's creation and they do not detract from the overall enjoyment of the book.

Jones has been a classroom teacher and his concerns regarding teaching speaking to Japanese students helped inform this book. For instance, he writes about his frustration at the results of his speaking classes, noting that 'conversations stubbornly refused to develop much beyond question-and-answer sequences' (p.9). There are also some examples of practical lesson ideas (pp.27, 86-87, 110). However, these lesson plans are not really intended as teaching aids but rather instruments for conducting research and this is perhaps illustrative of the work as a whole. Although it is accessible to teachers, at heart it is a work of research. For instance, all of the main body chapters are written in the IMRaD style (introduction, methods, results and discussion) common to many research papers. This is not to say that there is nothing that teachers can gain from this work but that it clearly falls within the genre of 'research', albeit, 'research lite' rather than practical teaching advice.

Aside from those with a specific interest in conversation strategies, this book would best suit Masters level researchers who are interested in seeing how a problem can be tackled from various different perspectives. Alternatively, it would be invaluable to teachers who are preparing to carry out small scale research projects for themselves. Jones clearly and methodically illustrates how to conduct different types of research projects.

One principle (p.164) I found particularly interesting was Jones' suggestion that 'simple, everyday topics' should be used when practising conversational strategies. This is because students can focus on the strategies rather than focusing on the language. This idea aligns well with the concept of reducing cognitive load on learners when teaching (Lethaby *et al* 2021). Similarly, the third study demonstrated that explicit instruction of conversation strategies could be effective. All too often when teaching we may have the feeling that what we are doing is not helping, or alternatively we may accept the view that students just need exposure and they will 'pick it up' at some unspecified point. Jones shows here that teachers can be effective at imparting what can seem like ephemeral skills.

As Jones notes, speaking is a, if not the, key skill in learning another language. One phrase that left an impression with me came at the end of the book when the author notes that the joy of speaking is that you get a chance to express yourself, connect with other people and 'for a few minutes,

you stop feeling like an infant in an adult's body' (p. 168). I share his hope that teaching conversation strategies is one way of moving students closer to that goal.

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Lethaby C, Mayne R & Harries P (2021) *An introduction to evidence-based teaching in the English language Classroom*. Shoreham-by-Sea: Pavilion Publishing

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OET Reading & Listening Skills Builder: All Professions

Tom Fassnidge
Express Publishing (2020)
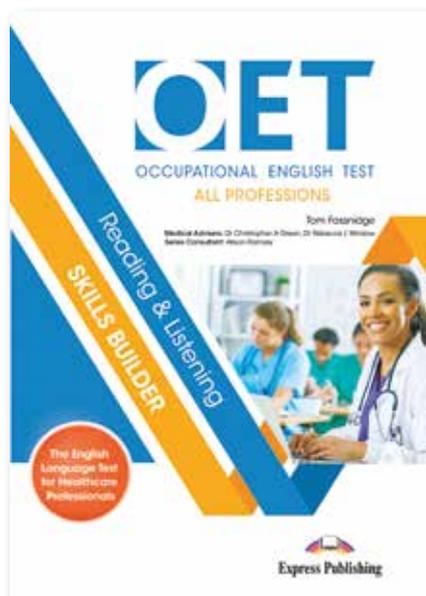
For many years, the Occupational English Test (OET) has cowered in the shadow of its wealthier, sexier and better-known sibling IELTS. For those new to the test, OET is a language proficiency test aimed at healthcare professionals across 12 disciplines such as medicine, podiatry or vet science. With the amalgamation of Cambridge and Boxhill (instigators of this innovative testing system) the format has become slicker, security tighter, and training more standardised, in other words OET has

become 'Cambridgized'. Fairly recent acceptance in the UK has also moved it closer to IELTS in terms of recognition.

Due to the recent nature of its global breakthrough, there has been a dearth of preparation materials for candidates until now, so it is a delight to encounter Express Publishing's 'Reading & Listening Skills Builder' by Tom Fassnidge with medical advisers Dr Christopher Green and Dr Rebecca Winslow. A complementary text exists for listening and speaking skills.

The OET is a complex test. Candidates don't choose it as an easier alternative to IELTS but because they feel committed to and reassured by the medical content. They require a wide range of complex, profession-specific language for the workplace and test preparation provides an avenue for this. Fassnidge's textbook is, of necessity, equally complex. The array of linguistic sub-skills, medical content, test format explanations and test day tips provides a behemoth of a textbook, which can feel intimidating for teachers and students alike. However, it contains absolutely everything you will ever need to know about OET listening and reading and once it's on your bookshelf you need look no further, whether you are a teacher

Sections	Reading Subtest	Listening Subtest
A	Expeditious Reading (15 mins) 4 short texts, 20Qs	2 consultation extracts (5 mins each). Complete notes.
B	6 texts (50 words) Manuals, guidelines, emails etc. 6 MCQs	6 workplace conversations (1 min each). 6 MCQs
C	2 texts (800 words) 8 MCQs	2 presentation extracts (5 mins each) 12 MCQs

Table 1. OET test elements

designing a preparation programme or a candidate working alone.

The 10 units each have a subject focus. Some read as generic language textbook topics, 'A day in the life..' or 'The Mind' while others have the reassurance of professional practice like 'Infectious Diseases' or 'Training and Best Practice'. It is a minor niggle, but a professional tone across the topic choice, would be preferable.

In headers, each unit lists clear objectives to relate exercises to different parts of the test. One difficulty for any OET textbook writer is the range of testing types covered by the actual test. For those who have not encountered OET, test elements in these skills can be summarised as in Table 1.

In explaining the content of each element, Fassnidge's text is often quite dense. A successful candidate for OET aims for a B pass or CEFR C1 equivalent, but a beginner in week 1 of a formal programme or self-directed learning may be a band below this and find some of the explanations perplexing. For example, in the introduction, he describes the test orientation as follows:

'In both subtests Part A has the most focus on specific details, Part C emphasises

interpretation of meaning … and part B includes elements of both these approaches' (p.6).

'Parts A and C each contain recordings of about 5 minutes each and part B contains 6 recordings of around one minute each'.

A new test taker embarking on their OET journey, may find this verbosity fairly incomprehensible and the layout could be improved by a tabular format or some judicious bullet-pointing. Having said that, the content page is a work of art. Here it is made clear exactly which A, B and C matches each test element, how each skillset and topic is related, and which texts and audios are test standard.

Once into the units themselves there is a lot to like. The material has an in-your-face, up-to-the-minute feel which abounds in images of i-phones, e-files, anti-bullying notices, medical periodicals and even a sample article on boot camps for internet-addicted Chinese youth. Something particularly accessible is the relation of materials to real world,

workplace scenarios. For example, in one unit, the reader imagines they are preparing a research presentation on asthma. This gives a clear purpose to extracting relevant information from assorted short texts. In the listening unit the scenario is a training observation wherein trainees attend a patient consultation, MDT meetings and a lecture. This almost adds a storyline to the dissonant elements and makes further sense of the test format.

The book is designed for in-class or self-study (with a partner) and never loses sight of its ultimate test-day aims. Activities are time-managed throughout (*'Take a maximum of 2 minutes to…'*) extracts cover all 12 professions and there are several complete test-length texts and audios including a 5-minute lecture by a cardiologist on 'Heart Monitoring Apps' and a full written text on 'Emotional Support for Animals'. The slow build in complexity of text and task is well designed and provides a step-by-step foundation in both reading and listening skills from newby to test-ready candidate.

The audio is on CD and may require a hunt around for a plug in CD drive. Obsolescence is increasingly problematic in teaching technology and I welcomed the accompanying Digibook. Although there is no additional material beyond the book, it does have digital audio. However, I was dismayed to find this expires in less than a year and if I was to use this online in class, the irritating blinking owl image on the website could well result in techno-rage!

Overall, this is an excellent step-by-step introduction to skills needed for a complex and challenging test. Fassnidge will save teachers considerable footwork, guiding them through a minefield of skills and contexts. Candidates often identify their main deficiency as specialist vocabulary and this could be emphasised more clearly in textbook units. Better still, perhaps this is a new textbook project waiting for Tom Fassnidge.

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Summary of books reviewed

Title	Page	Author	Publisher	ISBN
Inside Online Language Teaching: Conversations about the Future That Became The Present	83	Ross Thorburn	Independently published	979-8706817-626
A Lexicon for ELT Professionals	84	Diane Nicholls	ELT Teacher 2 Writer	979-8682078-295
Conversation Strategies and Communicative Competence	86	Christian Jones	Candlin & Mynard	979-8720382-643
OET Reading & Listening Skills Builder: All Professions	87	Tom Fassnidge	Express Publishing	978-1471596-995