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# Journal

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## FOCUS: Transitions in ELT



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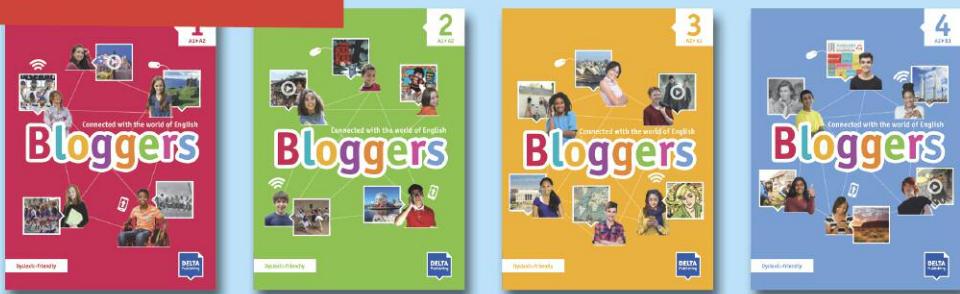
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# contents



- 6 President's page
- 7 From the Editor's desk
- 8 Call for submissions
- 10 ETAS news
- 11 Ask Alex

## 12 AT THE CHALK FACE

My students already know things: Freire, dogme and celebrating learners' prior knowledge • Chris Richards

## 14 CLASS ACT

English for Hospitality: The tripartite structure of a 'language apprenticeship'

- Patrick Julian Huwyler

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## 16 THE INTERVIEW

Training techniques: The ‘golden treasure’

Interview with Matthew Hill • David Kaufher and Christina Kwok

## 18 FOCUS • Transitions in ELT

STUDENTS’ ATTITUDES, PERSPECTIVES, AND CULTURAL AWARENESS

### 20 The role of mindfulness in reducing anxiety in language learning

• Shpresa Hasani and Merita Ismaili

### 23 Hooray, we have made great progress! • Andrea Lustenberger

### 26 Topics of conversation and cultural differences at a Japanese university • Pak Man Au

TEACHER CAREERS AND CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### 28 TESOLs’ versatile career cycles compared to secondary school teachers • Carol Waites

### 32 Freelance English language teachers’ informal learning through open educational practices in Switzerland • Patricia Daniels

CAREER TRANSITIONS

### 36 Transitioning and evolving as a teacher of English as a foreign language • Neil Bullock

### 38 Engineering to communication coaching • Chan Park

### 39 A straight road to happiness or endless diversions? • Elsbeth Mäder

### 40 Be open, flexible, and curious • Elsbeth Mäder

### 41 Teacher training is...insightful • Lorenzo Sclocco

### 42 Building a niche: English with confidence for technical writers

• Interview by Carol Waites with Chris Morgan - entrepreneur, niche builder

COMPUTER-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING POST-LOCKDOWN

### 44 Transitioning to computer-assisted learning in classrooms • Christopher Hunt

LANGUAGE TEACHER IDENTITY

### 46 An English teacher identity in transition:

Experiences of relocation to Switzerland from Ukraine • Olena Marina

### 48 Inside(r) looking out • Lesley Fearn

TEACHING OLDER LEARNERS

### 50 Successful teaching and learning with older learners • Briony Beaven

## RESOURCES

### 53 Introduction to resources • Hannah McCulloch

## 58 AFTER CLASS

Geoff Tranter

### Index of advertisers

- 2 Klett
- 25 Hilderstone College
- 31 Express Publishing
- 43 Cambridge
- 60 Pearson

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

2022 has been a year of renewal for ETAS. New Executive Committee members, a new administrator, new volunteers, a new website, and new members.

I knew that "new" would be challenging and that has proven to be true. But "fresh" has also been refreshing. These days we hear a lot about renewable energy, and the energetic teamwork I have witnessed would be measured in gigawatts.

If you walk into either of our semi-annual conferences on a Saturday morning, you will find a beautifully arranged display area with all the latest publications, games, and methods. You will see signs directing you to the various workshops and plenaries. Your stop at the registration table will be seamless and organized. Lunch will be served on time and will always be yummy.

But these sights don't just miraculously appear overnight having been prepared by Santa's elves. A team of volunteers spends the previous Friday afternoon scurrying around unpacking boxes, setting up tables, moving bits and pieces here and there, checking the audio and visual systems, and making sure that everything will be pulled off flawlessly. (Ok, I admit that there are sometimes glitches, but we usually figure them out.)

Of course, the setup is also the result of careful preparation. For instance, the last Professional Development Day required months of tireless work from Rose Travers and her events team. Every detail had to be discussed, tried out, and planned to the minute detail. I look forward to seeing them again perform their magic as they are already hard at work on the upcoming Annual Conference and AGM in Solothurn.

The learning curve for the newest volunteers was enormous, but they willingly rolled up their sleeves and got to it. Each of them soon discovered that the atmosphere, though busy, was also fun and exciting. Between laying a tablecloth and setting a banner in place, a lot of singing, joking, and overall cheerful banter could be heard over the gentle directions from those in charge.



And when it's all over? Play the recording backwards adding a few more souls who stick around after the closing bell and help out spontaneously. We always leave the venue in the same immaculate shape we found it. Most of the components end up in the new administrator's station wagon to be stored until the next event. Katie's work isn't finished until she unpacks the next day.

Likewise, the new website has been the culmination of countless days and weeks and months of construction, proofreading, changing, and organization by the ETAS teams and the creators. You will find it much more user-friendly, comprehensive, and dynamic.

One of my favourite new items is a site-specific search engine. It will be much easier to find what you are looking for. I personally love searches. Last year I found a small heart shaped stone while snorkeling off a Greek beach. I traded it to my wife for a kiss!

If you are not yet a member of ETAS, what are you waiting for? Sign up, show up, and share up. You will be renewed. You will be refreshed. You will be energized.

Still Connecting, Still Growing, Still Thriving,

*Yuval Shomron*

# FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK:

What was your path to EFL? Did you think about becoming a language teacher from an early age? Perhaps you changed jobs after initially pursuing another profession? Or you may have begun with a CELTA and built a career from the ground up. These are just three of the many paths that lead to our diverse and exciting profession, and each may influence our pedagogical approach and general attitude towards EFL as a career.

In the 1990s, the UK Government launched a publicity drive aimed at encouraging people from other professions to move into teaching. These involved several vox pops of highly paid professionals who had decided that teaching would be a more fulfilling career. And they were brilliantly satirized by the British comedians Armstrong and Miller in a series of "Be a teacher" comedy sketches. You can find them on YouTube. But be warned, these aren't for the naturally indignant. And those of us whose careers developed following one or more post-university gap years may find some of the jokes hitting a nerve or two. But I hope you'll appreciate the humour.

So, having chosen a career in EFL, how do we feel now? Being part of ETAS shows that we take our profession seriously, are open to new ideas, and want to be part of a wider teaching community. We are also likely to have amassed an impressive amount of resources if we've been teaching for a while. My two main weaknesses are the two main types of recipe books: those for food and those for teaching. They all look good on the shelves, but TBH, only a few get regular use.

At the centre of it all is the teaching. It's creative, essential, and appreciated. My approach to the EFL class is similar to my take on cooking. I'll sometimes wing it with a lesson that I know will go well, but taking the time to try something different can be especially



rewarding. When cooking, it usually takes me two or three goes to nail a new recipe. It's the same with a new lesson plan. While it may be true that much of the teaching goes in the planning, it's not until our first class gets going that we can see whether things will work out as planned. It will often take some fine-tuning until the aims of a new lesson plan coincide with its actual outcomes. But it's worth it for that high when you come out of a class that has gone well and which the students have really enjoyed.

Of course, it's not always plain sailing. Teaching has its many high points, but it can have its darker moments. We may feel underappreciated. Misunderstandings between colleagues may hinder constructive teamwork. We can sometimes feel overwhelmed by the workload. In the extreme, we could come dangerously close to burnout. The pandemic has taken its toll on us in many ways, and this is one of the considerations behind the Summer 2023 Focus topic of Mental Health. As the call for submissions says, the pandemic continues to consume our thoughts and energies, and it has become more critical than ever that we take care of ourselves and each other, whether we are teaching, learning, or both.

In my last editorial, I suggested we take some of the time afforded by the summer vacation to review our teaching and update our courses where necessary. This time around, I'm going to suggest that, as far as possible, we take advantage of the festive season to be ... well ... festive. If we have the luxury of two weeks off work, then let's set our out of offices as soon as possible and not check our emails until we're officially back again. Let's take a complete break from work and enjoy time with our friends and family without worrying about work. We'll be better teachers for it, I'm sure.

And then let's all register for the ETAS conference (28 - 29 January 2023). Because while taking a complete break is essential, there's nothing more likely to get us fired up and looking forward to being back in the class than a weekend sharing ideas and having fun with other motivated teachers. Hope to see you in Solothurn!



# CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

## Focus: Mental health

Contact: [matt.firth@e-tas.ch](mailto:matt.firth@e-tas.ch)

Deadline: 20 March 2023

As the pandemic continues to consume our thoughts and energies, it has become more critical than ever that we take care of ourselves and each other, whether we are teaching, learning, or both. With this in mind, the Winter Focus will explore the topic of mental health in ELT, and we invite submissions on topics including, but not limited to:

- establishing the ELT classroom as a psychologically safe space;
- language, activities, and tips for opening up about mental health in ELT;
- the power of positive thinking in teaching and learning;
- overcoming “imposter syndrome” in the classroom;
- incorporating mindfulness into English lessons;
- learning from disappointments, mistakes, and feedback;
- coping with potential day-to-day stresses of working in ELT;
- practising compassion and gratitude in ELT settings;
- celebrating successes in English Language Teaching;
- laughing and learning together in the ELT classroom.

## Focus: Employability skills

Contact: [matt.firth@e-tas.ch](mailto:matt.firth@e-tas.ch)

Deadline: 25 July 2023

Recent trends across all levels of education have seen an increased integration of employability skills across curricula. Many schools, universities, and employers understand the importance of teaching soft skills to students and employees, and this trend has profoundly impacted the EFL practice. Courses that once focused on English language skills now adopt a broader communication skills in English approach. EFL teachers with a sound knowledge of the soft skills needed in the workplace can benefit from this trend, and training courses often include the teaching of employability skills in their programmes. The Winter Focus will explore employability skills, and we invite submissions on topics including, but not limited to:

- training soft skills in English;
- how teachers and learners can best meet the demands of today's workplace;
- the challenges involved in training soft skills to pre-service learners;
- designing in-house training courses;
- integrating ICT into employability skills training;
- the testing, assessment, and evaluation of employability skills;
- employability skills for EFL teachers;
- exploiting our skills outside the EFL classroom (e.g. writing articles, proofreading, advertising);
- materials development;
- teaching transferrable skills;
- helping students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills;
- encouraging concepts such as professionalism, teamwork, collaboration, and other key skills in both our courses and in our professional relationships with other teachers.

All submissions must include a 50-word abstract, a brief author biography and recent photo, and a postal address. Articles should not include “commercial” text selling, promoting, or endorsing products or services. Contributors will receive one complimentary copy of the ETAS Journal.

**FORMAT:** Submissions must be in Word format and sent as an email attachment.

- Size: A4 page size, portrait (vertical)
- Font: Arial, 12-point font, black, left justified
- Spacing: 1.5 lines
- Do not use columns, indents or frames.
- Do not use headers or footers.
- Tables and diagrams must be in Word format.
- Other illustrative material should be in black and white and sent separately by mail.
- Photographs must be in JPEG format.

## REFERENCES:

The ETAS Journal follows the APA 7th Edition Reference Style Guide. Sample formats for both in-text citations and references are available online at: <http://owl.massey.ac.nz/referencing/apa-interactive.php>

In-text citations must be included in the reference list. Please see ETAS Journal issues published after 2011 for examples.

# CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

The ETAS Journal invites the submission of articles on various aspects of language teaching and methodology, lesson ideas, surveys of teaching materials, and reports that address language issues in Switzerland or the surrounding countries. Please adhere to the following guidelines when submitting your work.

## **SUBMISSIONS:**

Please send submissions in Word format by email attachment including a short biography, a recent photo, and mailing address to: The Editor (matt.firth@e-tas.ch)

The ETAS Journal reserves the right to make editing changes without prior consultation with the author(s).

Authors will be contacted regarding any major editing or revisions.

All contributors will receive one complimentary copy of the ETAS Journal.

The ETAS Journal and the author(s) hold the copyright to the articles published in the Journal.

Articles may not be reprinted without prior permission of ETAS Journal and the author(s).

Submissions may be:

## **A FULL-LENGTH ARTICLES**

Conceptual, research-based, or theoretical arguments that bridge theory and practice in ELT.

Word count: 2,000 (maximum, including references).

## **B AT THE CHALK-FACE**

These articles are aimed at helping teachers do a better job – in and outside the classroom. They are descriptions of, or reflections on, teaching techniques or activities, teaching methods, best practice, professional development, and other useful information, including target audience, materials, resources, and procedures.

Word count: 1,500 (maximum, including references).

## **C CLASS ACT**

These articles focus on practical teaching techniques and materials design.

They include sample materials, notes on teaching procedures, and recommended resources.

Word count: 2,000 (maximum, including references).

## **D IT WORKS FOR ME**

Collections of short teaching ideas clustered around one particular theme. These would ideally include warmers, fillers, activities that could be extended to form the basis of an entire lesson, possible variations (e.g. for teachers working online).

Where possible, please also include some activities that incorporate the learners' mobile devices.

Word count: 2,000 (maximum, including references).

All submissions must include a 50-word abstract, a brief author biography and recent photo, and a postal address.

Articles should not include "commercial" text selling, promoting, or endorsing products or services.

We also welcome reviews of the latest classroom and reference materials.

Please visit <https://www.e-tas.ch/journal/guidelines/etas/journal-book-review-guidelines-0> for more information.

## **FORMAT:** Submissions must be in Word format and sent as an email attachment.

- Size: A4 page size, portrait (vertical)
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Summer 2023: 20 March 2023

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**The Vast Field of Language Education**  
**Saturday 28 and Sunday 29 January 2023**  
**Kantonsschule Solothurn**

# Ask ALEX...

The “Ask Alex” feature first appeared in the ETAS Journal Spring 2019. The editorial team, which receives numerous requests for advice or assistance from teachers (and students), decided to share our responses to these with our readers. Alex Nevins began the column when working part-time as an English teacher. After several years at private language schools, Alex became a freelance teacher and also worked in the areas of assessment and teacher training. The idea for “Ask Alex” grew directly out of Alex’s experiences and those of colleagues. ‘Alex Nevins’ is a pseudonym.

We are currently looking for writers to support Alex’s excellent work on the column. If you feel you could help advise fellow teachers and would be interested in writing for “Ask Alex”, please email [editor@e-tas.ch](mailto:editor@e-tas.ch). This is a reprint of the first appearance of the “Ask Alex” column from the ETAS Journal Spring 2019.



## Dear Alex,

I've been teaching for almost ten years but recently I moved to a new town and work in a new school. In my lessons, students seem to be doing fine but I feel like some fresh ideas would help. I've tried talking with colleagues in the teachers' room but everyone is reluctant to share. They actually seem rather put off by me being there at all! I know I'm a good teacher, but after so long, I don't even remember if I'm still doing everything right. Where can I go?

— Isolated in Switzerland

## Dear Isolated in Switzerland,

This feeling of working in a bubble is something we teachers all share. While we might be skilled at connecting with students, encounters with other teachers are relegated to rushed chit-chats around the photocopier. Additionally, starting a new job can also mean adversarialism because more established teachers feel like you are encroaching on their share of a finite number of courses. But it shouldn't be like that. The first thing to do is join teachers associations such as ETAS and IATEFL, which are excellent places to get inspiration and discover practical methods to apply in class. These only meet once or twice a year, so you also need to build your network in the town where you work so you get the support you need.

Through ETAS, you'll connect with regional groups, which are providing support, like the reading group in St. Gallen, Spark in Basel, So-Pro night in Lausanne, or ELT Springboard in Bern. You can find all of them on the ETAS website. Check out what they're doing, and then set up a local teachers group yourself.

At the ETAS PD Day last year, I went to a workshop about the teachers group in Bern. What they said was good advice. All you need to get started is a place, a date, a way to tell people about it, and some ideas. Find one colleague who shares your feelings and buddy up with them to organize meetings together. There are already a few successful groups doing this in Switzerland, but if there isn't one near you, do it yourself! I think a core reason ETAS has been around for so long is because teachers like you want quality professional development and to network with like-minded colleagues, and are dedicated to making it happen.

Talk with colleagues over a glass of something in a place away from work. This will allow you to develop trust and camaraderie instead of adversarialism. Choose relevant and interesting topics. And talk about what you do in the classroom. Actually, it's inevitable that if you get a few teachers together they will start talking about work, isn't it?

Remember, there is no such thing as “doing everything right” because adapting to every situation is the name of the game. Already, you are doing the most important thing right, because you're being self-critical and are open to improvement. Anyone who is worth their salt wants to get better at what they do. Meanwhile you're also widening your network and creating the warm camaraderie that is lacking.

It's understandable that your colleagues in the teachers' room aren't open to sharing. It's a tough job, time is sparse, and unfortunately we don't get paid to help each other. Meeting outside of work will be worthwhile for you, not only professionally, but personally it will help you feel like you're not a solitary hunter, but a member of the pack. What you have to do now is find the people near you that are in the group that share your professional values and are also looking for an enjoyable way to continue developing in their career.

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Should you have a question or simply wish to find more information on a topic that interests you, please send your query by email to: [editor@e-tas.ch](mailto:editor@e-tas.ch). If we feel it would interest a spectrum of our readers, then we shall publish it along with the response. You are free to include your name or request that the query be published under a pseudonym. Please note that individual correspondence will not be entered into.

# At the chalk face

## My students already know things:

Chris Richards

### Abstract

Working with what students already know when they know different things and covering a course book page is a tricky balancing act. In this article, I propose a *dogme-lite* approach to celebrating what our students know within a prescribed syllabus.



### Biography

Born in Cardiff, Chris taught English language and literature in Birmingham and South Wales before moving into the field of ELT. Now working as a Teacher Mentor in Madrid, he is particularly interested in literature in the ELT classroom, use of L1, and inclusivity and diversity.

challenge facing those of us who work in extra curricular language teaching rather than mainstream or mandatory education is that our teaching groups are not formed of students from the same school class. When I was working in high schools as an English teacher, I knew that all of my students had covered the same concepts and materials because they had done so with me. In contrast, now, each of the students in one of my groups might have their regular English classes with different teachers in different schools. Some may have covered a particular unit's vocabulary already, while others have yet to see it. If ascertaining the extent of students' prior knowledge of a topic before teaching it is good practice in all contexts, in extra curricular language teaching it is essential.

Thus, designing our lessons with the "test teach test" methodology in mind allows us to gauge the level of knowledge our students bring with them, helping them to reinforce that knowledge through practice before they take the next step to build on their prior knowledge. In addition, by recognizing through our lesson planning that students come to us already knowledgeable and by making that recognition explicit, we encourage students to see that we do not imagine them as an empty receptacle waiting "meekly" to be filled (Freire, 1970, p. 45), but rather as individuals who already have something to say. This, in turn and over time, will lead to our students themselves recognizing that they come to the table with knowledge.

Acknowledging and valuing the language knowledge students bring with them has broad implications for both our short and longer-term planning, and the materials choices we make. If we use published course books when working with younger students, our curriculum path and vocabulary sets are decided for us in advance. This might lead to wasted material if our students already have some of the language points secure. Additionally, it tacitly obliges us to ignore our students' existing language knowledge because we have set material to teach them in front of us on the pages of books parents have bought. Finally, published material privileges a centralized, or

Freire (1970) wrote that students call "themselves ignorant and say the 'professor' is the one who has knowledge and to whom they should listen [...] Almost never do they realize that they, too, 'know things'" (p. 37). If our students come to class with knowledge, why does Freire suggest that they don't realize that they know things? One reason is that perhaps we — their teachers — don't acknowledge this and thus provide an external validation of their prior knowledge. In this article, I'll use my teaching context, classroom experiences, and some reflections on dogme to unpack the second part of this quotation and explore how we can centre learners and their existing knowledge in our practice.

In my context, teaching English in a private language school in a city outside Madrid, it's likely that the content of our syllabus has already been covered to some extent in the school system our younger students attend. The lessons they attend with us are not their only source of English language education nor do they form the core of the English tuition. Rather, our classes provide an extra curricular activity that supports and reinforces the teaching they receive at school. A

# Freire, dogme and celebrating learners' prior knowledge

globalized approach that doesn't take into account the local, contextual information that practitioners use. Ironically, it might also tacitly diminish the value we place on professional judgement, forgetting that teachers also know things.

This is not to say that published course books don't have a place. They provide a structure for our courses and ready-made materials to support them. It is especially true that the materials designed for young learners often contain characters and ongoing narratives that help students connect to and engage with the lessons. Increasingly, they offer interactive materials, apps, and gamified online learning environments that students can access outside classroom time. This is to say, they provide more ready-to-go materials than the average teacher could create. In addition, early career practitioners who are focusing on honing their craft are especially likely to over-rely on published course materials (see Paiz, 2020).

However, what could our younger learners achieve if we moved our practice away from following the pages of a book and what would that look like? Dogme is a teaching approach that developed following an article published by Scott Thornbury in 2000 inspired by the *Dogme 95* film-making collective. Dogme argues for conversation-driven lessons, minimal use of materials, and a focus on emergent language. A pure dogme approach is likely to be problematic in many contexts and has been criticized for a number of reasons. One issue that might arise at the outset is how students, or rather parents, might respond to us teaching without a syllabus. Additionally, those early career teachers I mentioned earlier might struggle without a clear curriculum to follow. Thus, I would argue for dogme-inspired practice, which I have called dogme-lite, over pure dogme. Such an approach would help us rethink how we plan lessons, sequences of lessons, and even our year-long syllabi.

How might this look in practice? To start with, by relying less on published course books and prescriptive syllabi. A syllabus might have units that last eight or twelve lessons, like a conventional course book inspired plan, with broad themes to inspire student-centred lessons: "My Free Time" or "My Neighbourhood". Materials might be sourced or produced as and when necessary to support learning rather than as the centre around which the entire course and individual lessons are structured. Finally, rather than specifying the vocabulary list, we could start each unit or discrete sub-unit finding out what students already know so as to acknowledge and celebrate their prior learning and find out what they might want or need to know next. This latter goal can be achieved by asking students to talk about the topic; required vocabulary will then come to light as students ask you to supply language.

For example, I recently asked a group of ten-year-old children to talk about what types of TV, films, and books they like and dislike, and to give reasons for their opinions. During the speaking task, vocabulary gaps emerged for both the genres and adjectives to explain their reasons. It's interesting to me, therefore, that despite having a range of existing vocabulary, it wasn't always the vocabulary they needed to explain their own likes and dislikes. The following task, in the same pairs, was to generate a list of all of the vocabulary they already had to talk about genres. Then, we reviewed the lists in open class feedback and recorded the new vocabulary that had emerged during the discussions, and any other questions they had. This was also an opportunity to explain false friends (we use the word "horror" in English where "terror" is used in Spanish) and to explain that these are "genres" of film not "genders". Thus, I followed the dogme precept, which is to centre the learner and their emergent needs for language. In addition, I also responded to Freire's observation that students don't know that they know things.

For any number of reasons, pure dogme might not be possible or desirable in your context. This article isn't arguing for an uncritical embrace of dogme and a complete rejection of the course books on your students' tables. As Simon Gill (2000) argues, what we use should always be determined by what the specific situation necessitates and, furthermore, "all the tools we use [...] have the potential to be valuable". However, this article does encourage the reader to try a dogme-lite approach. For example, when you start a new unit, really interrogate whether the first page acknowledges students' existing language knowledge or privileges a vocabulary set determined by the key word lists. If the latter, plan a version around that page that also makes room for your students to be at the centre. That way, we'll take a step towards challenging the notion that the only person in the classroom worth listening to is the teacher and, in addition, we'll remind our students that they too have knowledge.

*Such an approach would help us rethink how we plan lessons, sequences of lessons, and even our year-long syllabi.*

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# A CLASS ACT

## English for Hospitality:

### The tripartite structure of a ‘language apprenticeship’

Patrick Julian Huwyler



#### Abstract

This article focuses on three stages of hospitality service and provides practical tips and advice for anyone with an interest in the field of hospitality.

#### Biography

**Patrick Julian Huwyler** is a teacher and materials writer with over 15 years of ELT experience. He specializes in teaching English for hospitality as he is a qualified chef and waiter. He has an MA from The Open University.

English for hospitality (HE)—synonymous with the “leisure industry” and also known as “Hotel English” or “English for the catering industry” is not simply an extension of general English but rather a subcategory of English for Specific Purposes. It is usually taught in language schools, hotel management schools, and generally within the industry itself. Sometimes only subtopics and subskills are taught, such as how to take an order for food and drink. Graham Workmann (Huwyler, 2016, p.148) defines it as “The kind of English used by professional people who meet tourists and visitors from other countries, e.g. hotel reception staff, hotel managers, porters, waiters/waitresses, bar staff, tourists guides.”

Hospitality service has three cyclic stages: *the welcoming*, *the service*, and *the farewell*. Waiters, hotel receptionists, and housekeepers deal with these interdependent stages constantly and each is essential in creating a delightful guest experience. In other words, they reflect the real and natural order of the industry and not the systemic structure of coursebooks.

#### The welcoming

This stage is deceptively simple. Apart from learned language such as *adjacency pairs*, higher education (HE) students need to be aware of the need for *phatic communication*. Many guests often come with a bag full

of expectations and a judgemental eye—especially if they have had disagreeable experiences elsewhere. According to the maître d’hôtel where I completed my apprenticeship as a professional waiter, the *welcoming stage* is *rapport mis en place* (the opportunity to establish rapport with the guest in case of any problems later on). How the guest is treated and made to feel is paramount. If the guest is welcomed with open arms, spoken to in a very friendly manner, and made to feel important, they are less likely to complain if something goes wrong. In my experience, many are actually more likely to defend the friendly staff from the blame and concern of the upper management. The HE learner, therefore, needs to not only know what to say but *how* and *when* to say it. Communicative competence is key as HE is inherently affective.

Prepare the HE learner for this stage by having them:

- Focus on their emotional reactivity to certain situations. They need to be sensitized to the type of guest they are facing and respond appropriately.
- Address the guest by name/surname. If possible, encourage the learner to study the reservation list and memorize the guests' names as well as their room/table numbers before their arrival. So when the guest arrives, the hotel receptionist or maître d'hôtel does not have to consult the reservation list and can directly escort them to their room or table. This is not only professional but also creates a good first impression, and it is standard practice at first-class establishments.
- Be increasingly aware of appropriate body language (posture, proximity, etc.).
- Learn some background information about their establishment. HE learners need to be able to converse with the guest during in-between moments and not just when taking an order or saying hello.



**“**

*Hospitality service has three cyclic stages: the welcoming, the service, and the farewell. Waiters, hotel receptionists, and housekeepers deal with these interdependent stages constantly and each is essential in creating a delightful guest experience.*

**”**

There should also be some focus on cultural awareness, politeness (such as using honorifics, titles and surnames), and predictable language items such as adjacency pairs, and frequently-used exponents of a range of functions while incorporating appropriacy of register and style. Ultimately, guests at five-star hotels and first-class restaurants want prestige. They do not merely come to wine and dine.

### The service

HE learners at this middle stage need to have the operational know-how and technical language. Surprisingly, this is the stage where many HE coursebooks fall short. For instance, pre-experienced learners need to know about meat doneness (e.g. *rare*, *medium-rare*, *medium-well* and *well done*) when taking an order for food. And they also need to know in which order the guests should be asked. It would therefore be invaluable for the HE teacher to obtain some firsthand experience in hospitality and to consult industry-related materials such as menus, waiter handbooks, and cookbooks. Many coursebooks, due

to their generality, lack technical depth and even essential terminology. For example, staff-to-staff communication and interaction require a certain amount of hospitality-speak such as *mise en place*, *first-in*, *first-out (FIFO)*, and *bain-marie* (used in the kitchen and in service).

Prepare the HE learner for this stage by having them:

- Study the necessary procedures and operations, and working texts. Waiters, for instance, would need to know what is on the menu. They would have to know how to pronounce, describe, and spell/write the items. Good waiters go well beyond this and can give background information, anecdotes, and personal recommendations.
- Learn how to deal with complaints (with an emphasis on communicative competence, e.g. using the appropriate register, avoiding stock phrases, using “I-apologies”).

If the staff have already established rapport with the guest, then any problem that arises could be an opportunity to actually prove how good and professional the establishment is. This is known in the industry as the “positive moment of truth”.

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Ideally, HE learners should be “shadowed” as they perform their duties, and according to the situation, be given either on-the-spot or delayed feedback. However, be careful not to correct the student in front of the guest. Only about a third of the course/teaching time should be spent in the classroom for giving feedback, reflecting, clarifying, demonstrating, and analysing industry-related grammar and language.

HE learners, at all levels and stages, need practice at the coalface. Confinement to a classroom and coursebook is not conducive to *learning by doing*, and it is certainly not geared to the highly functional and highly stressful environment in which the students will inevitably find themselves. The learning in hotel management schools, for example, is experiential. The students take turns cooking for and waiting on each other. They are the receptionists, they are the chefs, and they are the waiters. And parts of the school are often open to the public. Practice first, theory second—this is how apprenticeships, internships, and practicums are modelled. It would, therefore, make sense to have a “language apprenticeship” as well. After all, apprentices and trainees in the industry practise with real knives and real fire.

### The farewell

Like the *welcoming*, the *farewell* stage might appear to be simple but it requires careful observation, sensitivity, and even resourcefulness. I would say that it begins as soon as the guest in a restaurant asks for the bill or when they are departing from the hotel. Encourage your HE learner to see things from the guest’s perspective.

Prepare the HE learner for this stage by having them:

- Know the difference between “service charge” and the “tips” as this is something guests often ask. A service charge is an extra charge for service with which the waiters are paid. Tipping is voluntary, the service charge is not. One memorable quip from a head waiter was “The service charge is included—the tips are not. But we’re happy if you are.” And the guest tipped handsomely.
- Respond appropriately to compliments as well as complaints.
- Say farewell and thank the guest appropriately (the guest’s name should be used). Eye contact and a sincere smile are important. Good waiters can “mirror” the guest’s energy and respond with a suitable (and memorable) response. In first-class establishments, some waiters even wait until the guest is out of sight—in case they turn back and wave goodbye again.

# THE INTERVIEW

## Training techniques: The ‘golden treasure’ Interview with Matthew Hill

David Kaufher and Christina Kwok

Author, leadership trainer and coach, conflict mediator, and intercultural facilitator, Matthew Hill has over 20 years of experience in training, coaching, executive search, and country-entry consulting. As the owner and head trainer at Hill Networks Limited, he helps directors and managers get to their goals with new and international teams. He also hosts a YouTube channel called the Intercultural Training Channel, which informs companies, culture trainers, and intercultural coaches, and is a platform for exchange between them, about current issues in the field of culture. On behalf of ETAS Journal, we are delighted to welcome Matthew into these pages.



### How did you get into the intercultural skills training business?

It was a funny accident. About 12 years ago, I was in the Czech Republic for five and half years, and I began to think that I knew about the Slavic psychology. I came back and put a small advertisement on an HR job portal saying that I was an executive coach and that I understood overseas business. Then I got a call from an enormous German company helping a British couple who were just about to be sent to the Czech Republic. They asked me to put together a five-day course. I only later found out that I'd done my first intercultural relocation training. I didn't know the field existed. It was a happy accident. Then I became addicted – addicted to different countries, different teams, different corporations, different scenarios – and I broadened out from culture to leadership, conflict, communication, and leadership soft skills.

### What do you consider are some of the qualities of a successful intercultural skills trainer?

That's a good question, and I might surprise you with some of the answers. I would say business acumen is the most important. You will be speaking to people in business and you need to understand the fundamentals of what they're doing, and what they're speaking about. Essentially, you have to learn their language.

The second thing would be self-awareness. You need a sense of your own prejudices, your baggage, your preferences, your point of view, and your world view. The reason for this is so you can detach yourself from the conversation and genuinely help other people at work.

The third quality is curiosity. You need to be curious about people, cultures, corporations, towns, houses, cost of living, or political systems. I think a passion for history is very useful. So, cultural curiosity is very useful. Other important skills are storytelling, empathy, and active listening.

### What have been your more interesting or challenging cultural training projects?

I love three-day cultural conflict courses. I will be given team A, who are from one department, and team B, who are from another department. We will be put together for three days. When they come in, they won't look at each other. There is no eye contact, no shaking

of hands. It's pretty tense. My job after three days is to unpack the power, the emotion, the culture, and promote the healthy recognition of difference, a context of human rights and respect, and get to reconciliation. The goal is to form some sort of a team.

At the end of the course, there's a final non-verbal test that we do. On the final day, we ask the cafeteria or restaurant to have tables of four, and you say that it's free seating. A record of success with cultural conflict resolution is that they sit in mixed formation in the restaurant.

Afterwards we appoint ambassadors and escalation channels and keep contact to keep an idea of what's going on. I love that training because it's important, because I empathize with the pain and want to diminish it. But there is a clean and obvious result at the end. There are smiles and handshakes, a couple of hugs, a bit of forgiveness. And there is an intention to carry on in a different way, with a different energy. So it's very satisfying as a human being and as a trainer.

### How do you follow up with clients to check on progress, to know that behavior is actually changing, that the learning is actually sticking?

In post-work, first there is a very simple first follow-up, which is three questions that we ask in a conference call two weeks after the training.

1. “What do you remember from the course?”
2. “What is working, what are you applying from the course?”
3. “What is not working? What have you tried, but doesn't work?”

So the follow-up to the training doesn't ask if it is retained, or not. The follow-up really asks, “*What is working well, what is not working so well, what needs a refresher?*” Then we really drill down to the specifics. We go from theory to practice, and then practice to habit. Just training will not get you to habit. More is required to turn what is learned in training into a habit.

### What is the role of the ambassadors in making this change become habit?

There are two things. One is, there's escalation or intervention. If things are going wrong, you go to the ambassador first. That's the starting point. The ambassadors would take extra training and coaching to spot conflict or cultural differences – the negative spiral

of cultural encounter. When they spot the early signs of that, which might be criticism, for instance, they intervene.

The second and more interesting part is that the ambassadors continue to be the presence locally. They encourage curiosity and learning, and provide access to materials about other cultures. An example of something they might do is they might have a lunch-and-learn. This means they meet once a week in the canteen and say, 'OK, guys, let's sit over here, go around one at a time, and say what we've learned.' They are very important at being the satellite trainer with the agenda of continuing where the training leaves off. They remind people of the theory, they give a little bit of coaching feedback on the practice, and they continue with the dissemination of further information.

#### **Do you have trouble getting feedback from people at the end of a project?**

This is a really important point. The starting point is to identify what change clients want to achieve. If they want to achieve a change, then something's going to happen. Customers need to have a very clear change they want to achieve with clear outcomes. Not everyone does, and the conversation can stop there. The second part is, they need to have a very healthy dialogue with individuals in their team, normally through the appraisal or feedback process. And the third part of this triangle is, we can only measure the after if we've measured the before. Here we use tools like *The Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Training Evaluation Model* and other things. What Key Performance Indicators are in place, and what measures are there? What's funny is, a lot of customers stop at that point and say, "Forget it!" They don't want to put in the hours, the complexity, the communication, or the networking necessary to set up the before measures, and therefore facilitate the after measures.

#### **What sort of training would you suggest for language teachers who want to branch into this field?**

Historically, a lot of language trainers have gone into the intercultural training field. The massive gift, the golden treasure that they already have is training techniques. Language trainers are full of innovative, attention grabbing, clever interactive activities. Without a doubt, they should hold on to that. Often what they're missing is commercial reality. I would recommend to get an eBay trading account and start auctioning your products, start a small business, or become self employed as a trainer. You will really start to understand the language of business. That's important.

If you want to become a freelance or an independent trainer and possibly get your own customers, which is very valuable (you will get three to five times the fee for one day of self-earned business), I would go on a five-day, putting-it-all-together course. One such course the editors recommend is the Intercultural Communication Institute in Portland, Oregon, founded by Milton and Janet Bennett (<http://www.intercultural.org/about.php>). That's available in most countries, certainly in Europe. They will teach you the basics of what intercultural training is, and give templates for various length training sessions. They'll also teach you about etiquette, and provide pre-work tests you can use.

Another idea is to use assessment tools. It could be Ursula Brinkmann's *International Readiness Check*, Nigel Ewington's *International Profiling Tool*, Phillip Rosinsky's *Cultural Orientations Framework* (<http://www.philrosinski.com/cof>). There are lots of different things that you can do if you want to add to your credibility. It depends on how much confidence you've got really. If you need a template, a model, a test, then they can be very useful tools to get. The bad news is, it's a bit of time and money. The good news is, you will be absolutely ready. When you've done that you'll be ready to roll.

The key thing for everybody is the missing leg from the table. This is contacts. Contacts, contacts, contacts. You need commercial contacts. You need contact with the big providers of training. No contacts equals no food. If you start networking, giving out your card,

building up your LinkedIn profile, then you are going to get some good business at the end of it.

#### **Could you give me a bit of advice as a part-time freelancer trying to break into this field? Who do you contact, is it HR or operations departments?**

You're really entering into a very interesting world. In the old times, you would likely have done this: "*Learning and development Director, hello my name is Christina, this is what I do.*" That really does not work anymore. So I would not even make a phone call. I would do other things. I would get my LinkedIn profile completely up to date with key word identity, where the word 'trainer' appears 10 times. I would get five hundred plus contacts, then a thousand contacts, then fifteen hundred contacts. I would go to Sitar events, conferences, congresses, chamber events, Bandl networking events and collect as many cards as possible, follow up with an email, a Skype chat, a smile, a summer post card, a winter Christmas card. I would write clever posts on whatever channel on George Simon's 5000 strong Sitar Europa site. And the magic is when you get an email coming in from a corporation saying, "*Wow, you're busy in the social media space. Could you come and see us next week?*" Then you have hit the Las Vegas slot machine bonus. The cherries are there and the coins are spilling out. You can charge three to five times as much as a sub contract training day. You are credible. You can use that logo. You can use that story in a case study. And then you can really promote some more.

The other way to promote yourself is a newsletter, trainer to corporate. Try and get it in to someone. If you have someone's business card, you do have permission to send them a newsletter. Make it short, dynamic, and with a video. You should be receiving incoming inquiries via email, based on your social media profile. The days of cold calling large companies are finished, gone and dead. It doesn't work anymore. The craziest thing happened once. I got a government, calling me, to give me some business, and I didn't even need to fly to that country to close the deal. That is the power of LinkedIn.

#### **Could you tell us something about your current projects, and why you set up this intercultural training channel?**

The intercultural training channel is a passion of mine. It is articles, videos, which are in three forms: interviews, webinar highlights, and full webinars. It's a free resource, and is not for profit. I'm irritated that there aren't more free resources for professionals interested in this field. There is also reciprocity. So if someone has done a really good webinar, they will get inquiries. They probably will sell a book or get a training day. So there is benefit there. But it's not all commercial. And it's gone down incredibly well.

I do it because I like to connect with people. We're in a virtual world. Social media is the biggest gift anyone has ever given humanity. When I do a webinar and you've got people from Japan, Mexico, and Finland, getting on at some crazy time, listening, and typing questions in their own countries, I think that is absolutely mind blowing. So our job is to really interact, to give away information that we know, to share our talent, and to participate in global conversation. And from that we can make a difference, we can promote change. We can diminish some of the misunderstanding, bigotry, prejudice, and hatred in the world. And hopefully, we can promote a little peace and understanding.

Thank you, Matthew, for sharing your insights on career prospects and training methods. We are sure that English teachers reading this will take away useful ideas for their own career development.

To contact him, send an email to [matthew.hill@hillnetworks.com](mailto:matthew.hill@hillnetworks.com). He tells us that if you make an inquiry, such as "Have you got something on...?", he might say "Yes". If he says, "No", it might inspire his next project!



## **Introduction to Focus: Transitions in ELT**

When we started discussing and reflecting on this Focus edition's theme, Transitions in ELT, we realized the potential to attract diverse contributions from a variety of stakeholders both in and beyond our borders in Switzerland. Even though some language teachers might feel isolated in their profession, they do not work in a vacuum and their decision-making and actions can be influenced by many factors emanating from within all layers of the ELT industry. And equally, language teachers can be influential in shaping people and things in their immediate teaching contexts, and beyond, e.g. language teaching associations, the direction of ELT publishing materials, ELT research agendas, and so on.

Viewing potential transitions in ELT from this perspective, we drafted a call for submissions which was by no means exhaustive. We were open-minded about submissions and suggested several themes to prompt reflection and creativity, e.g. transitioning from one ELT field to another, career changes, language teacher association roles, language teacher identity, and a paradigm shift to online teaching during a crisis. We were thrilled with the response. A few authors wrote to us and asked whether they could go beyond the scope we had suggested, which was a delight to hear. We are pleased to present to you these insightful articles which stem from language teachers, researchers, teacher trainers, and coaches from around the globe.

The themes presented in this edition overlap in many ways, so we have attempted to group them according to the main focus of each article. The themes include student attitudes, perspectives, and cultural awareness; teacher career cycles and informal CPD; career transitions; computer-assisted language learning post-lockdown; language teacher identity; and teaching older learners.

### **Students' attitudes, perspectives, and cultural awareness**

Shpresa Hasani and Merita Ismaili present research findings from a case study exploring the effectiveness of mindfulness techniques in the language classroom and students' attitudes towards these techniques.

Andrea Lustenberger also provides research findings which explored the student perspective. She investigated how students in a Swiss school perceive their learning of English from the start to the end of Year 3.

Pak Man Au provides insight into teaching English at a Japanese university and explains the challenges that many students face as they enter this new environment, as well as the cultural differences between Japan and Canada, his home country.

Dr Patricia Daniels and Dr Carol Waites

# FOCUS

## Transitions in ELT

### Teacher careers and Continuing Professional Development

Dr Carol Waites delves into a case study from her earlier research which explored TESOLs' versatile career cycles compared to secondary school teachers. She shares some valuable CPD insights that are useful for teacher trainers, school administrators, and language teachers.

Dr Patricia Daniels demonstrates the current relevance of Carol's findings in her own article, which investigated freelance English language teachers' engagement with and informal learning through open educational practices in Switzerland. In this edition, she focuses on how and what freelancers learned through these practices and the reported impact on themselves as language professionals and their teaching practices.

Both studies find that the "tinkering" and personal creative time spent adapting materials to their students' needs and interests can be more satisfying than more formal professional development.

### Career transitions

Neil Bullock shares his reflections on transitioning and evolving as a language teacher and teacher trainer and sheds light on the value of being active within language teaching association roles. Neil takes us on a fascinating journey from his pre-teaching days to the present.

Chan Park explains how he made the transition from engineer to English communication coach and reflects on the diverse pathways that led to this point, including years of tango dancing and hosting Tango Zen workshops.

Elsbeth Mäder takes us on a trip through her professional career and shares what she learned along the way and encourages fellow teachers to be open, flexible, and curious. In her second contribution from an earlier ETAS Journal, Elsbeth demonstrates that our careers as language teachers are seldom linear pathways and are often interspersed with challenges and milestones. She highlights the role that teaching associations can play in terms of CPD, but also the inspiration that can come from interactions with fellow teachers.

Lorenzo Scocco reflects on his recent transition from teacher to teacher trainer and explains how the career shift came about. He gives valuable insight into his training strategies and shares his expertise through practical examples.

Carol summarizes an interview with Chris Morgan who has had several transitions during his career. We learn about his ongoing journey, the niche he is currently pursuing, and his approach to language teaching and coaching.

### Computer-assisted language learning post-lockdown

There are many expectations on language teachers to integrate information communication technologies into their classrooms. The Covid-19 pandemic meant that the majority of us had to shift to online teaching from one day to the next, whether we and our students were technically and pedagogically prepared for the shift or not. Christopher Hunt explores the role computer-assisted learning is playing after the pandemic and questions whether it is an opportunity or a hindrance.

### Language teacher identity

Olena Marina has had to relocate from Ukraine and is currently doing post-doctoral research at the University of Teacher Education in Lucerne. In her article, she describes how this relocation has impacted her teacher identity. We gain insight into what events triggered changes in her development. Olena also provides some practical tips for teachers who are planning to work abroad.

Lesley Fearn also tackled teacher identity in her article. She examines her transition from teacher to practitioner-researcher, which is also known as insider research. Lesley's article is an autoethnographical account of her experiences as a doctoral researcher. It is an insightful reflection of a personal learning journey which was not without its challenges.

### Teaching older learners

Briony Beaven has based her article on an ETAS PD Day workshop she gave in 2019 about teaching and learning with older learners. Her article is rich with practical tips and strategies for any teacher currently working with this target group or those who might do so in the future.

We thank all the authors who have contributed to this edition. It is so inspiring to hear your voices. One theme that runs implicitly through all these articles is the willingness of language teachers to openly share their reflections and professional expertise. We are confident that their articles will inspire and encourage our readers to reflect on who and what they are doing now, and where they aim to be in the future in terms of personal and professional development.

# The role of mindfulness in reducing anxiety in language learning

## Abstract

As educators, we are asked to do a lot beyond teaching such as meet student learning objectives, contribute meaningfully to district-level decisions, supervise extracurricular activities, and provide social-emotional coaching. Considering that nowadays any kind of information is easily accessible thanks to technology devices, for students to prosper it is not enough to "know" but they also need to "know how." Therefore, the role of the teacher is no longer mainly that of provider of the information but rather a facilitator that will help students to gain lifelong skills. Many types of research suggest that using a mindfulness approach in language learning can enhance the learning progress. It can help students to be actively engaged in learning activities by focusing on meaning, increasing their attention and creativity, and at the same time lowering their stress level. This paper will discuss in which way mindfulness can facilitate the language learning process by demonstrating mindfulness techniques that help students to deal with anxiety and stress. The objective of this article is to emphasize some characteristics of mindfulness in today's language teaching and learning trends used at the Faculty of Languages, Cultures, and Communication (FLLC) at the South East European University (SEEU). The data were obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted at the end of the semester. The findings of the research will help EFL teachers to use strategies that reduce anxiety in foreign language classes. By utilizing these techniques, they can help learners to navigate their learning progress, increase their self-confidence, generate new thoughts, become conscious of their thinking, facilitate their learning process and cultivate creativity.

**Keywords:** mindfulness, academic success, language progress

## Biographies

**Shpresa Hasani** has more than 15 years of university work experience and has completed numerous courses, and acquired international certificates in teaching English. She received a Bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature, and a Masters in English Language Teaching from the South East European University. Shpresa has a great passion for the English language and has taught all levels from beginners to advanced. She is a patient and caring teacher, and is committed to helping all students reach their potential. She loves to challenge her students to be curious, take chances when learning, and aims to provide them with as many learning opportunities and experiences as possible to engage, motivate, and prepare them for the future.



**Merita Ismaili** completed her studies at Tetova State University in 2002 with a degree in English Language and Literature. Since 2003, she has worked as a high lecturer at the South East European University (SEEU) - Language Centre. She has attended various professional development workshops and has a CELTA, and an MA in the English Language Teaching programme at the SEEU. At the moment, she is a PhD student at the University of Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria.

Shpresa Hasani  
Merita Ismaili

## Introduction

The definition of mindfulness, according to Kabat-Zinn (2003), is paying deliberate attention to what is going on within a person, in the present moment, in an open and non-judgemental manner. In other words, the purpose of mindfulness is not to empty the mind of thoughts but rather, as Brady (2008) states, to "knowingly observe our thoughts or behavior." Mindfulness is often used to reduce stress and become more in tune with one's inner thoughts and feelings. Practising mindfulness techniques such as focusing on the breath or self-reflection leads to a greater feeling of calm (Bauer et al., 2018). This can help language learners to manage their stress levels and anxiety. Most students taking language classes are rarely aware of their emotional states during language learning. They might feel reluctant to participate in class activities due to their performance pressure fear. Considering this, the teacher can help them pay more attention to their awareness or mindfulness which can lead to efficient and effective learning.

The purpose of this case study was to explore mindfulness in a Conversational English course, taught as a free elective course, with fourth-year students of the English department at the FLCC, SEEU. According to Herrnleben-Kurz and Walach (2014), mindful learning enables students to be aware, perceive, and comprehend information during their learning process. This research aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are students' attitudes towards mindfulness techniques used in the classroom?
2. Does it help them to decrease the level of anxiety in language learning?

## Literature review

Many researchers have indicated that using mindfulness techniques in the classroom can reduce the negative effects of stress and increase students' ability to stay engaged, helping them stay on track academically and avoid behaviour problems. According to scientific evidence, mindfulness meditation reduces stress and anxiety, enhances concentration, improves interpersonal relationships, strengthens compassion, and provides a slew of other advantages. As Jones (2018) explains, some of the benefits of using mindfulness in language classes are:

- improved focus: numerous studies suggest that students with better attention perform better on objective tasks that require a long period of concentration.
- emotional regulation: it has been proven in several studies that mindfulness causes changes in the brain that result in less reactivity and a better ability to engage in tasks even while emotions are active.
- greater compassion: people who practise mindfulness are more willing to help others and demonstrate more compassion towards others.
- stress and anxiety reduction: when encountering a difficulty, mindfulness reduces stress and helps in managing the learning anxiety.



When a teacher creates a positive and relaxing atmosphere in the classroom, the students feel more motivated to participate in classroom activities, express themselves freely, and become more mindful of their progress in learning. From a reactive state, they can easily move into a proactive state, where they can take control and direct their learning skills.

Many schools utilize mindfulness activities as a tool to help students cope with anxiety as well as develop soft skills and positive mindsets. Mindfulness techniques may also help to promote self-regulation, or the ability to plan, manage, direct, and sustain students' attention, emotions, and actions. Self-control allows students to manage their behavioural and emotional states to achieve a learning goal by promoting sustained focus, reduced stress, less aggressive behaviour, higher cognitive performance, and increased resilience.

According to Campbell (2009), students experience satisfaction when the teacher shows interest and compassion about the way they feel especially when they struggle or have difficulties acquiring new concepts. He states that managing the emotions and observing or directing them helps students to feel more protected and secure in the classroom. He also examines various human requirements such as the need for trust, facticity, self-verification, and a positive trade outcome, all of which trigger diverse emotions. Mindfulness practice encourages students to move from "doing" mode to "being" as a way of appreciating the ways their mind deals with feelings and thoughts. The notion of "acceptance" is prominent in many mindfulness-based approaches as it entails embracing everything that is happening in our lives with the qualities of kindness, openness, and trust, without relying on automatic responses and avoidance of unpleasant situations. Sibinga et al.'s (2016) research demonstrated that the disengagement from automatic processes cultivated through mindfulness practice led to "lasting changes in such observable traits as the flexibility of affective and cognitive styles and patterns of interaction with others" (p.137). The two mindfulness techniques that resulted in a positive effect on students' learning and helped reduce students' anxiety were mindful breathing and reflective journaling (Chen et al., 2013; Song & Lindquist, 2015). The study conducted by Van der Riet et al. (2015) highlighted that using mindful breathing in the classroom helped students to decrease the occurrence of negative thoughts, which resulted in reduced anxiety and more focused attention on classroom tasks. Similarly, Charoensukmongkol (2016) concluded that reflective writing activated their metacognitive skills by supporting their effort to understand and observe the learning process with more awareness.

## Methodology

This qualitative study took place during the winter semester of 2021/22 with 28 students attending the Conversational English course. The semi-structured interview questions aimed to answer the two research questions. Two mindfulness techniques were used during the whole semester. Mindful breathing was used at the beginning of each class and reflective writing was used at the end of the class.

## Results

Students' attitudes related to using mindfulness in the classroom were extremely positive. They all claimed that the two techniques that were used in the class helped them to take control over their learning progress and they felt more relaxed during the class activities and tasks. The benefits that they highlighted are discussed below.

### 1. Mindful breathing

Learning a language is a long and difficult process; therefore, the teachers should find solutions to make the classes more engaging and fun. When we introduced using mindful breathing before each class most students were sceptical since they were not familiar with this technique. I assured them that I would guide them through the process and explained some fundamentals of mindful breathing and reflective journaling. After we had finished the first session, the energy in the classroom immediately shifted to a more positive and calmer atmosphere. As we walked them through breathing practice, I slowly made my way around the room, determining the effects of this mindfulness practice. Some students had completely surrendered to the breathing, flopping over in their seats, while others simply sat quietly breathing and taking a few moments to clear their minds of their earlier emotional struggles. Related to research question #1, the data obtained from the semi-structured question number 1 on the questionnaire (What are the effects of mindful breathing on you? Do you like it?), the interviews were analysed using thematic content analysis. The results showed that all students preferred mindful breathing practices. The quantified qualitative findings are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:**  
Positive effects of mindful breathing practised in the classroom

Positive effects	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. Having positive feelings	12	42.8%
a. Feeling relaxed	6	21.4%
b. Feeling calm or still	4	14.2%
c. Feeling relieved	2	7.14%
d. Feeling confident	7	25.%
2. Reducing anxiety	20	71.14%
3. Helping memorize things	6	21.4 %

The positive effects of mindful breathing are presented in Table 1. This technique helped students to reduce their anxiety (71.14%) and increase their positive feelings (42.8%). Students also indicated that after practising this technique they could more easily memorize the things learned in class (21.4%). According to most students' responses, this activity helped them focus their attention and soothe them. It helped them to calm their emotions and reduce stress considering that they required assistance in developing positive stress management strategies. They pointed out that these breathing exercises helped them to relax and shift into a learning-ready mindset. It also enhanced their focus and prepared them to concentrate on the task by putting extraneous distractions aside. Some of the students responses were:

"I love practising mindful breathing because it helps me feel calmer and more connected to the present moment. I am also more aware of my language performance since I'm more concentrated to observe myself."

"I like practising this technique in the classroom since it gives me a moment to relax. I always feel refreshed and prepared for class afterward."

### 2. Reflective writing

Reflection is considered a useful activity in language learning since it promotes critical thinking. The students can keep track of the knowledge they acquire as well as the skills they learn. By observing thoughts and feelings, they can improve their learning abilities, reflect

on their progress, and become active learners. Writing down their thoughts helps students make connections between what they are thinking, what they are being taught, and what are they doing. From the feelings and thoughts emerging from reflection, many concepts that have to do with student learning can be generated and improved. According to Van der Riet et al. (2015), reflective writing helps students examine their thoughts, perspectives, and actions. Reflective writing is an important factor that helps raise the interaction among students and increases their motivation by helping them learn more efficiently. This technique helped students to answer the following questions: What do I know? What do I want to know? What have I learned? (Bauer et al., 2018). As students pointed out, this mindful technique helped them to generate new thoughts and become aware of their thinking, reflect, and think critically. Some stated that:

"Reflection writing helps me feel less worried about my classes because it reminds me that it's going to be fine if I work hard instead of worrying a lot. I become more aware of solutions when I put things on paper."

"I would suggest teachers use this technique in the classroom because it releases all the bad thoughts, lowers the anxiety by helping to calm down, and be more focused on classroom tasks."

"By defining my strengths and weaknesses I can easily set clear goals and track my progress. Reflection is an eye-opening technique."

Reflective writing confirmed that the level of anxiousness was reduced since the students felt more relaxed while putting their thoughts on paper and evaluating their learning productivity. They defined it as an effective technique that helped them develop self-understanding and strengthened their intra-personal skills. It enabled them to think easily, developing their confidence and taking control over their language competence.

## Discussion and conclusion

Students took control of their learning by using mindful practices. Teaching should serve not only as a means of providing information but also as a means to incorporate learning into students' daily actions and behaviours. When practising mindful activities students developed a stronger bond with their inner potential. They became more eager to take risks, focused more easily on their learning, and were confident in their ability to discuss and participate in classroom activities. Additionally, the students had the opportunity to grow new ideas, think critically, and enhance their writing skills while practising reflective writing. Students became more attentive and productive when they were conscious of the learning process and observed their learning progress.

These data imply that mindfulness increased students' creativity and improved their learning outcomes (Brensilver, 2016). This achievement was made possible by the students' awareness. The teacher had a vital role in the early phase of introducing mindfulness techniques by facilitating and leading the process. As a result, the students grew more self-reliant and had greater control over their learning (Jones, 2018). As a result, the students engaged in active learning and took charge of their progress. Mindfulness practices have been shown to help students reduce their stress levels, assist with behaviour management strategies, and improve self-esteem. Based on the research, better self-control is connected to better task completion and a better comprehension of the assigned class activities. Mindfulness helped students to reduce stress by improving their ability to monitor experience, particularly by managing attention and practising sympathetic acceptance of feelings. Students were able to move through feelings more quickly by pausing and gaining perspective on what is happening as they embraced experiences and feelings with patience, kindness, and awareness.

Under the supervision of their teacher, language learners can use different mindful learning practices in the classroom. The study offers teachers some tips on how to incorporate mindfulness in language classes in a way that can boost their English language abilities through useful tactics, sparking student attention, developing awareness, increasing confidence, and increasing efficiency.

Furthermore, EFL teachers can include mindfulness techniques in their teaching and help students become more conscious of their studying, reduce stress, create a comfortable environment, improve attention, learn more effectively, and achieve better results. Considering that language learning is a high cognitive activity, the students are required to be "present" when they practise it. When they are self-aware, they tend to identify the things that might create blockages. To take control of their learning, students need to become aware of their limits and expand the possibilities in which way they can acquire the language in a manner that is more acceptable for them. When students practise mindfulness, they give their full attention to a particular task, so that the efficiency of learning increases. It opens doors to more clarity and increases the level of productive learning.

*Mindfulness practices have been shown to help students reduce their stress levels, assist with behaviour management strategies, and improve self-esteem.*

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# Hooray, we have made good progress!

Dr Andrea Lustenberger

## Abstract

How do students in a Swiss state school perceive their learning of English from the beginning to the end of Year 3, their first year of learning English? I asked my pupils to fill out a questionnaire. They claimed good progress in the four skills, and positively surprised me with some of their answers.



## Biography

**Dr Andrea Lustenberger** is a lecturer of English methodology at the University of Teacher Education in Zug (PH Zug) and also teaches English at Stadtschulen Zug.

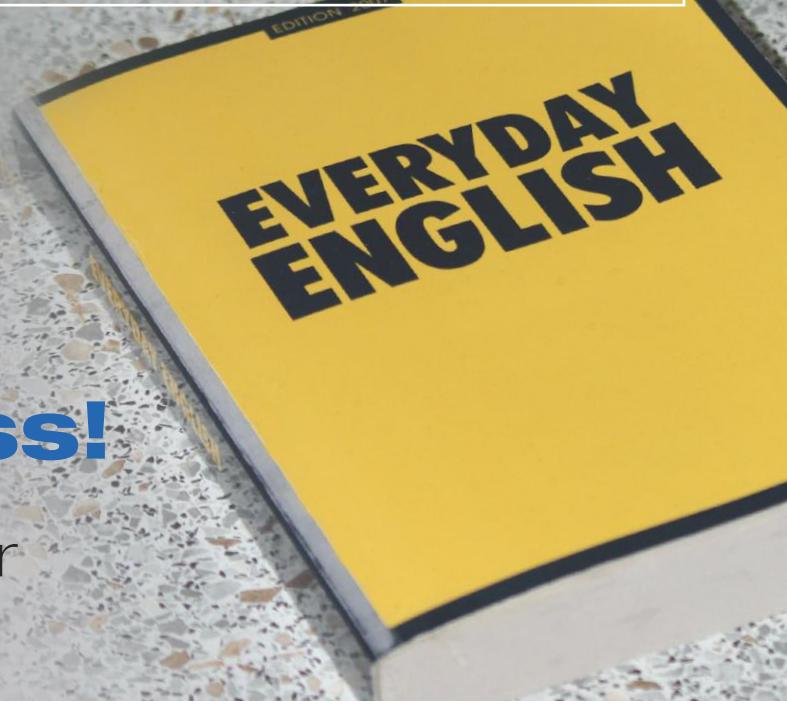
## Beginners

What actually is an English language beginner? There are absolute beginners who have not officially learnt any English beforehand and there are false beginners who have had some formal foreign language (L2) teaching, but do not feel confident using the language. In this article, I will describe the perceived progress of my Year 3 students in their first year of English as an L2. They are considered as being absolute beginners, but we will find out what prior knowledge they bring along and how they learn.

## Characteristics of young learners in Year 3

These children are about nine years old and, according to Pinter's (2017) classification, still younger learners (YL), i.e. they are in their first few years of formal learning. They have started learning to read and write the language of instruction, in my case Standard German. At the beginning of Year 3 they are still very slow in these, though, and some children need a lot of effort to master these skills. The children are often still playful, have a lot of imagination, and engage more easily in activities because they are less self-conscious than older learners. They learn more holistically, which needs to be considered when choosing the teaching method. Furthermore, "primary school develops basic competences" (Kolb & Schocker, 2021, p. 22) that help the children grow into a society, for example through collaboration. These competences can be achieved by fostering learner-centred approaches, through differentiation of the learning, and the inclusion of an action-oriented and exploratory approach. Nunan (2011) suggests that drawing on their prior knowledge, setting age-appropriate learning aims, offering strategies to master the tasks, and including relevant topics can assist learning.

Hutterli, Stotz, and Zappatore (2014) claim that despite the opinion that most of the children in Switzerland are raised monolingually, most children actually grow up multilingually. This is particularly the case in urban environments. Furthermore, travelling allows the children to pick up some words in other languages, and the many



English words we see in our environment and use in Swiss German, and encounter through digital media make it easier to get started.

## My class – my case

In August 2021, the time had come again, and I took over a Year 3 English beginner class in a Swiss state school in the town of Zug. The class consisted of 21 children: 10 boys and 11 girls. Slightly uncommon for the location of the school, there were no native English speakers, but four children were special: the parents of three of them sometimes spoke English to them, and another child went to an English-speaking kindergarten and had an English-speaking nanny.

The first year of learning English is always very special for me: it is fantastic to see how the children, who say very little at the beginning, thrive and can make themselves understood by the end of the school year. For this reason, I decided to investigate the children's perception of their own language learning process in English, and my teaching with a questionnaire. I asked their caretakers in writing for their consent and the children for their assent, and 19 children agreed to participate. For this article, I excluded the answers of the four special children described above because their prior knowledge would have falsified the results. Therefore, the results show the answers of 15 Year 3 children who were absolute beginners: eight boys and seven girls.

The children filled out a questionnaire in German (because of comprehensibility) during an English lesson in May 2022. I showed each question after the other under the document camera, which allowed me to clarify the question in case of bias. The questionnaire consisted of the children's

- remembered prior knowledge of English in August 2021
- joy in learning English
- attitude towards the English lessons taught in English
- judgement of their progress in the four skills in English during their first year of learning
- impression of what helps them learn English

I analysed the questionnaire by adding up the respective numbers of the answers (sometimes the children ticked two boxes; hence the total number might be more than 15), and grouped the answers to the open questions.

## The children's learning

As I had expected, most children reported some prior knowledge of the English language (Figure 1). They could count to 10 or even 20, knew the colours, could tell their own name, and ask other children for their name. As these were the first topics, they ensured a smooth start into English. What I found remarkable is that some children knew "thank you" and "please."

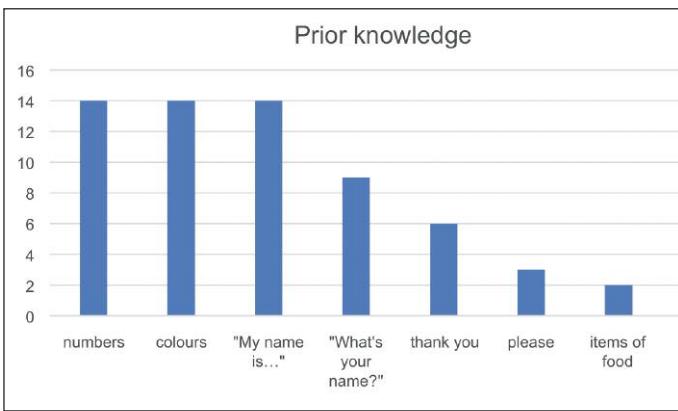


Figure 1: Prior knowledge (number of children per language item who already had prior knowledge)

This prior knowledge was a good basis to build knowledge and they claimed to have been excited about the new subject. In May, more than half still liked English very much and the others quite liked the subject because of the fun lessons, the teacher, the hand puppet, or the prospect of a new topic.

The hand puppet was something I decided to introduce for the first time in my English lessons; something that is actually common in L2 lessons in other countries, in particular in Germany, but not in Switzerland. The children loved it because it was very lively, talkative, and had fun ideas. It introduced new words, dialogues, structures, concepts, etc. but also talked informally to the children. In addition, the hand puppet supported understanding which the children thought was (very) difficult at the beginning as I taught in English predominantly and used German only if really necessary. Figure 2 shows the impressive growth in understanding and self-confidence: having a routine and being able to make meaning of body language, miming, and other support, the YL got used to English.

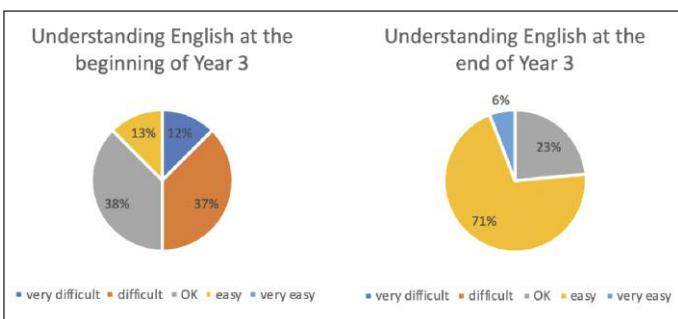


Figure 2: Understanding of English

The children were unanimous in saying that listening, which is necessary for understanding, was what they could do best (Figure 3). The answers to the questionnaire show that they best understood picture books I read to them, explanations of tasks and activities, and homework assignments. These activities were all supported by visuals (e.g. pictures in a book, worksheets, drawings), body language (e.g. gestures) or demonstrations by myself (e.g. fill in an example of their homework), and thus enabled the learners to make sense of the language input.

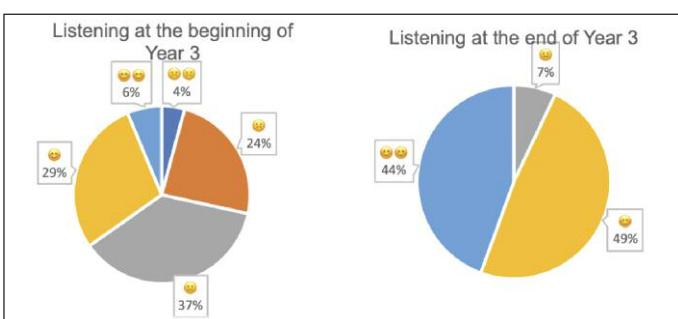


Figure 3: Listening

In primary school the focus is on oracy, i.e. listening and speaking. It is therefore not surprising that the children also perceived great progress in speaking (Figure 4). They said that they felt very confident in the topics we had already covered and very much enjoyed talking about food likes and dislikes, the weather, and suitable items of clothing, while the topic of the current unit (telling the time and activities you do during the day) seemed more challenging. But knowing that time is a difficult concept for Year 3 children, I did not want to overstrain the children, and put the focus more on the activities they do during a day.

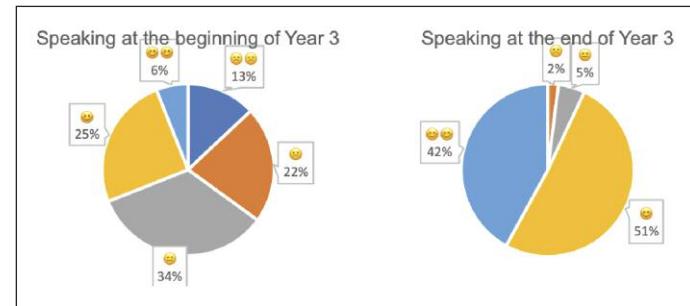


Figure 4: Speaking

After oracy, we move on to literacy. Reading in Year 3 is based on mainly reading individual words or short sentences, and the children then have to match a picture to the text or draw something accordingly. The children felt that these activities were doable and identified good progress in their learning (Figure 5). The reason for this could be that they had become accustomed to the spelling of the English language through recurring reading exercises, but also listening to books read out loud, and reading the lyrics of songs, chants, etc. while singing them might have sharpened their eye for the written word.

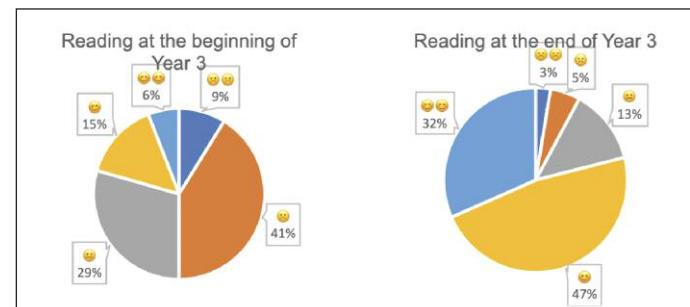


Figure 5: Reading

Writing is the most difficult skill because English spelling is not phonetic. This is mirrored by the children's answers (Figure 6). At the beginning, even copying was difficult, not to mention writing individual words or short sentences. But here, too, the exposure to the writing has paid off. In addition to the activities provided by the textbook, we also played writing games, wrote riddles, etc. which were more engaging than filling in worksheets and practising spelling.

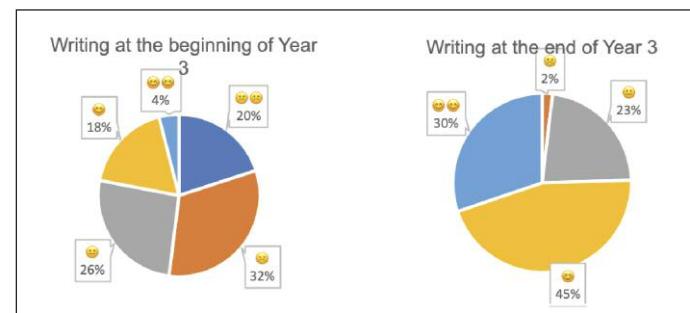


Figure 6: Writing

These insights from the questionnaire show that the children thought they had made good progress in all the four skills. When asking them about their improvements, 11 children claimed that they had learnt a lot during the English classes and the other four asserted that they had learnt quite a bit – a formal assessment might have revealed a different picture, though.

## Conclusion

These insights demonstrate that my YL perceived that they had an intuitive understanding of the language if, in their opinion, they were supported with visuals, body language, and demonstrations. And after a short silent period in which they soaked in the new language, they were willing to try it out themselves, not really being worried about making mistakes (Pinter, 2017). However, it is important to keep in mind the children's developmental stages, their imagination, playfulness, and their limited knowledge of the world.

This has implications for teaching. Kolb and Schocker (2021) assert that successful YL L2 classes need to consist of conducive learning environments and appropriate methodology while Nunan specifies that "there is no such thing as the 'perfect' method" (2011, p. 29), but a powerful mix of clear aims, age-appropriate teaching and learning approaches, and the inclusion of teaching strategies can support learning. Nikolov and Timpe-Laughlin (2021) confirm this child-friendly approach to the extent that motivation decreases if the target is on grammatical structures and learning words.

My Year 3 children appreciated this child-friendly mix, and in the questionnaire, they ticked that songs, stories, games, but also working on the computer, and learning vocabulary with word cards supported their learning. Drawing on this formulaic language and chunks empowered the students to participate in meaningful language use and real communication whereby they used the language creatively, not necessarily correctly, though, to convey meaning. Such affective activities that combine "emotional and intellectual aspects" (Nunan, 2011, p. 171) raised their interest and commitment.

However, not all songs need to be especially targeted to the children, as the example of our very first English lesson shows: I introduced the song *Hello, Goodbye* by The Beatles, which we repeated in the subsequent lessons. When filling in the questionnaire and looking back to the start, the children suddenly started singing the song telling me how much they loved it, while they found the children's songs and chants we sang were alright, but nothing more.

In the first lesson, I also introduced the hand puppet which became part of our English class and lesson. As described above, not only did it have an educational purpose, but it also engaged the children affectively and emotionally. I decided that it was from New Zealand, to add another English-speaking country and culture to my teaching; a culture the children did not know much about. Fantasy, imagination, and factual knowledge captivated the children, and at the beginning of the English lessons, they could hardly wait for the moment when our New Zealander woke up and made some noises in my English bag. The hand puppet served as *edutainment* and raised motivation for language and cultural learning.

Motivation is a combination of putting effort into learning and a true wish to reach a learning aim in connection with a positive mindset that influences language learning (Nunan, 2011), and as an affective factor it is an indicator for successful language learning (Nikolov & Timpe-Laughlin, 2021). Pinter (2017) argues that YL perceive pleasant activities as motivating. As motivation may decline after some time, strategies such as providing specific aims explicitly, appropriate content, scaffolding, peer learning, meaningful communication, and proof of improvement can maintain the children's interest (Nunan, 2011). Because I personally thought after a while that our hand puppet was a bit childish, I decided that our New Zealander should stay asleep in my English bag after the first semester. However, I was really astonished by the children's answer in the questionnaire that they would love to have it back and they did not think it was somewhat childish to have a hand puppet in class.

I will happily comply with your wish, dear children, and thank you for your valuable insights into your experience of your first year of learning and the very positive feedback you gave me. I am looking forward to teaching you in Year 4 and giving my best to create a safe space and inspire and facilitate your learning, so that learning English remains a positive experience.

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The advertisement for Hilderstone College English Studies Centre features a woman with blonde hair and glasses, wearing a blue blazer over a white t-shirt with a cat graphic, smiling while holding several books. The top half of the ad has a dark blue background with the college's logo on the left and text on the right. The bottom half shows the teacher and text on the right.

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# Topics of conversation and cultural differences at a Japanese university

Pak Man Au

## Abstract

Teaching English to Japanese university students involves not only teaching a foreign language but also cultural differences at the same time. With regard to conversation topics during a first-time meeting, certain topics that are considered taboo in Western countries can be considered appropriate in Japan. This article delves into this issue.



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Entering seas of new faces as a new academic year starts in Japan is both an interesting and engaging experience. The author, having completed university studies in Canada (home country), is always reminded of notable cultural differences when entering the campus gates. For instance, in Canada, the academic year begins in September, while in Japan, the academic year begins in April. The sight of blooming sakura (cherry blossoms) is a frequent reminder of a new academic year taking hold in Japan.

As an assistant professor at a Japanese national university, the author teaches English classes to freshmen students from a wide variety of fields. Their new environment is in stark contrast to their former high school backdrops. Not only do a significant number of students live alone for the first time in their lives, they must also learn to be independent in a new city and situation.

These new situations also apply to their freshmen undergraduate English classes. University English courses are mandatory for Japanese university freshmen students and, in many cases, are their first experience using the *communicative language approach* (University of Louisiana Monroe, 2020) for a large part of the class. Unlike their high school English classes where reading and writing were the dominant parts of the curriculum, at university, they have an opportunity to learn English comprehensively using the four skills, speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Sawa, 2020).

## A new beginning

As the academic year kicks off, students all over campus are welcomed into their new home for the next four years. English classes are no exception but something is a little different. Having had Japanese natives primarily teach them English during their high school and junior high school years, it is a novelty for students to learn from (mostly) native English-speaking university educators. Gone are the days of grammar drills and an intense focus on reading and writing. Rather, opportunities to practise speaking and listening are the new norm. Furthermore, the opportunity to learn English and other cultural norms from a solo native English-speaking teacher is a rare chance for Japanese students.

The first class starts off with the usual class orientations and student introductions to their new classmates. Most of them do not know their fellow classmates and there are some students who come from far flung prefectures, including Okinawa and Akita. Although the English curriculum in Japanese secondary education is standardized, as in most countries around the world, there are differences between schools, especially between public schools and private schools.

## Topics of conversation

When the theme of conversation topics in English arose, blank faces filled the classroom. The students' initial reaction could have been attributed to shyness which is viewed as a stereotypical Japanese trait, or indeed, could have been due to "recognized general difficulties regarding communication with foreigners" (Kowner, 2004, p.118). The lesson discussed what types of conversation were appropriate for meeting people for the first time, especially for small talk scenarios. This also coincided with learning about cultural differences. A list of conversation topics was given to students and they had to determine whether they thought the topics were either safe, maybe alright depending on the situation, or dangerous (taboo). For instance, the list of topics included themes such as age, health, physical appearance, politics, religion, income, weather, family, relationship status, and jobs.

From the activity, many of the students chose similar answers as "safe" topics of conversation for small talk. For example, as weather is already a common "small talk" theme amongst Japanese people ("Samui desu ne." = "It's cold, isn't it?"), this was easy to figure out. And, "age", for example, was a topic that was considered to be fine during a conversation with a new person.



In the following discussion, the author will touch upon several of the themes alluded to in previous paragraphs to illustrate what the Japanese students thought are suitable topics of conversation with non-Japanese people but are actually considered inappropriate in Western cultures.

## Cultural differences

As a generally homogenous nation Japan has a unique culture. Although there are small cultural differences between Japan and its Asian neighbours, there are greater contrasts with Western countries. To keep the comparison simple, some cultural differences are compared between Japan and Canada, the author's home country.

### Age

Referring to the topic of age being discussed with a new person, it should be noted that in Japanese society, asking somebody's age is not considered as rude as it is in Canada (Wikye, 2019). There is also the concept of *senpai* (senior or higher person) and *kohai* (junior or lower person) within relationships in Japanese society. So, based on this factor amongst others, Japanese people take age more seriously because they want to know how respectful to be towards another person. Even bosses who are younger than their subordinates will use honorifics to address the age difference (JP Smart Magazine, 2020).

### Health

Another conversation topic that many students thought was appropriate was health. Surprisingly, many students felt it was fine to ask others about their health during small talk in English. For example, it is not uncommon for Japanese to ask others about their blood type. However, this would cause bewildered looks in Canada to the person asking the question. Furthermore, the author noticed that generally Japanese students did not have any aversion to talking about what they did during their hospital visits, such as having a health examination. What we might consider to be uncomfortable in Canada, that is, candidly talking about what you did during a health examination, is not necessarily a taboo in Japan. When students were told of these two cases, they were surprised to say the least. Although some of these students seemed to speak English well, by not understanding the cultural implications of discussing such topics during first meetings with English speakers, they are setting themselves up for uncomfortable situations.

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## Physical appearance

In addition, many students indicated that physical appearance was a topic that was deemed acceptable to talk about during a first meeting with a new person in Japan. In Canada, talking about a person's physical appearance can make one feel embarrassed. However, in Japan, being blunt about someone's appearance is not considered a taboo topic. According to Mascetti (2017), "while the differences in foreigners' appearances attracted more attention, this bluntness wasn't just reserved for us — it's how Japanese people talked to each other". By comparison, in Western societies this might often be interpreted as a backhanded compliment or insult (Sokarno, 2020).

## Relationship status

Lastly, another theme that most students demonstrated a lack of cultural awareness was on relationship status. In Canada, it is considered inappropriate to ask about somebody's relationship status during initial conversations. From conversations with fellow foreign English instructors at universities where the author has worked, it is common for students and Japanese staff to ask about their relationship status or romantic life during an initial meeting. Donahue (1998) mentions that "Sometimes Japanese can be quite forward with foreign acquaintances in asking them personal questions about age or marital status" (p.194).

## Conclusion

Teaching the students about what conversation topics were appropriate when making small talk with new people was quite intriguing. The students themselves appeared to be utterly shocked as they were previously unaware of how they might have come across when speaking to a non-Japanese person.

It was comforting to know that they were eager to learn about what conversation topics were appropriate as well as about cultural differences at the same time. Some students mentioned to the author their desire to study, work, and live abroad in the future and that such information was invaluable to avoid cultural misunderstandings in their future host country.

It is a pleasure to teach young minds in another country about both communication strategies and skills in English and the corresponding cultural differences that play an important role in conveying those ideas without rocking the boat, so to speak. As many students realize the importance of English in our globalized world, it is of the utmost importance that they learn about the language itself as well as the equivalent cultural circumstances.



# TESOLs' versatile career cycles compared to secondary school teachers



## Biography

**Dr Carol Waites** taught writing skills and English exam preparation to international staff at the United Nations in Geneva for over 20 years. She is now a consultant, teaching writing skills to WHO staff globally and human rights lawyers, as well as English to master's level students in HES-SO Lausanne.

When I came to Geneva in 1992 to decide on my doctoral thesis focus in the area of career

satisfaction, I discovered that Professor Huberman from the University of Geneva had conducted an influential study of teacher career cycles, including one of secondary school teachers in Geneva and Vaud. He had named the phases they went through and interviewed teachers extensively about their careers and satisfaction levels.

I was astounded by the number of TESOLs in Geneva who were often accompanying spouses, and who undertook the CELTA, thus transitioning from another profession into TESOL. These were often older people, who brought valuable skills from other fields to their teaching. I wondered about the different attitudes and satisfaction levels of these versatile CELTA graduates compared to the more sedentary secondary school teachers described in Huberman's study (1989). As professions were becoming more and more versatile with people transitioning into different fields through their careers, I thought it would be an interesting comparison.

The TESOL field in Geneva in 1992 was unregulated with unqualified native-English speaker teachers being employed, although in most professional centres the requirements for qualifications were becoming more stringent. There was a training centre offering Certificate (CELTA) and Diploma (DELTA) qualifications, but with no clear incentive to qualify beyond Certificate level. Teaching opportunities were mainly limited to company teaching, private school teaching, or examination preparation with few opportunities for promotion or opportunity to move into different areas. Today, while the industry is still unregulated, most centres require qualifications and we can see professional TESOLs working in the higher education system across Switzerland with master's qualifications.

As a further comparison, I took my study to Sydney, which represented an Anglophone environment with more stable working conditions and multiple opportunities for professional development. Several centres offered Certificate and Diploma level courses as well as opportunities for study at university in graduate diploma, master and doctorate level programmes. A greater range of teaching opportunities existed for TESOLs: teaching migrants, international students who come for short stays, and English for entry to university. There were far more

## Dr Carol Waites

schools including private schools, university centres, centres for Technical and Further Education (TAFE), and business colleges. The field is tightly controlled by an accreditation body ensuring minimum standards of teaching, a teachers' award establishing salary scales and working conditions. This situation continues today.

My doctoral study spanned from 1993 to 1999. As there were a total of 73 respondents in the TESOL study compared to 160 in Huberman's study, any generalizations can be made only with very great caution. The research adopts a case study approach, but, where possible, attempts were made to group the responses to explore categories of answers. However, in what is essentially an exploratory study, no firm conclusions have been made about the TESOL profession as a whole.

Table 1 shows the main characteristics of the samples of the studies. Huberman's teachers were more experienced and older in general, and the male to female ratio was more balanced, with a more homogeneous setting. In the TESOL studies, there were more females than males and the respondents were from a more diversified setting, both public and private institutions.

The results of this study are still as relevant now as in the past. In 2013, Tessa Woodward gave a talk on this topic referring to Huberman's study at the International House Directors of Studies conference and linking it to TESOL phases and development. Ron White wrote a paper on the same topic in the International House Journal (n.d.). Both are worthy of delving into. Further studies over

Table 1: Characteristics of the samples and studies

Characteristics	Huberman's study	Geneva TESOL study	Sydney TESOL study
Number of respondents	160 teachers	Total: 30 including 28 teachers and 2 administrators	Total: 43 including 32 teachers and 11 trainers/admin
Years of experience	5-39	6 mths-29 yrs	6 mths - 27 yrs
Median experience (years)	15	11	9
Male: female (by % of sample)	46:54	17:83	33:67
Age range (years)	28-67	25-55	25-55
Source of respondents (by % of sample)	100% Geneva lower and upper secondary schools	20% international organisation 43% private language schools 37% freelance	47% university language centre 53% private language schools

more recent years focus on teachers' life cycles, mapping them onto professional development and policy (Lynn 2010; Eros, 2011; Steffy, 2012; Keller-Schneider et al., 2020; Freeman et al., 2022).

Huberman's study investigated whether the "classic" studies of the individual life cycle would be replicated when applied to secondary school teachers. More specifically, he wanted to determine whether there is a discernible developmental sequence in the teaching career, and, if so, to identify its main patterns and configurations. Finally, he set out to ascertain whether there are identifiable career sequences which lead to the perception by teachers of their "professional satisfaction" or "dissatisfaction".

Secondary school teachers tend to have more stable working conditions than adult TESOLs and tend to have joined the profession straight from university studies. These teachers, therefore, may have been in the profession for most of their adult careers, and may have reached negative phases of "defensive focusing", "withdrawal", "disenchantment" or "positive focusing", also called "cultivating my garden", which is a term Huberman borrowed from Candide (Huberman, 1993, p. 109). I surmised that the different backgrounds of the TESOL respondents might affect the phases they traverse and may lead to a different general career path from that of schoolteachers.

"Tinkering" is a term which Huberman borrowed from the French anthropologist Levi-Strauss (1966), in which the idea of *bricolage* (tinkering) is introduced. His metaphor for tinkering is an instructional handyperson, a do-it-yourself craftsman who can put to use a host of materials lying around at various stages of instructional disrepair (Huberman, 1996, p. 132). This was a frequent theme in Huberman's study to describe how teachers keep themselves motivated and up to date.

A subsidiary purpose was to note the effect of environmental, social, and historical factors on TESOLs during the course of their career cycles (Fessler, 1985; Huberman, 1989). Huberman maintained that teachers playing out their careers in times of historical or social turbulence are likely to have radically different careers from those traversing their careers in periods of calm, or periods of growth and expansion.

The TESOL industry had been affected by a series of historical events leading up to and during my study: the economic recession which affected all industries world-wide from 1988-1992; the Gulf War (1991), which affected the TESOL industry in Australia by temporarily stifling the numbers of students travelling from Asian countries to Australia, resulting in the collapse of some of the language colleges in Australia; the events of Tiananmen Square (1989) and the resulting collapse of many English language schools in Sydney, and the subsequent tightening of government control over the industry in Australia.

More recently, this sector has suffered a major blow in the Covid pandemic, with many centres closing or transforming their teaching into online offshore classes, particularly for university entry (Wells Advisory, 2021). Some managed to continue functioning with online teaching but many were not prepared. The impact of this situation is that TESOLs need to become even more versatile to adapt to the changing situation requiring more online and hybrid teaching. This was the case globally, and particularly in Sydney, Australia, which relies on overseas students.

Thus, all these factors have affected in some way the career paths of TESOL teachers, their morale, and their opportunities for advancement. We can notice that these are recurring themes and that economic, social, and political factors will continually have an impact on society, working conditions, and levels of satisfaction.

The second major objective of the study was to explore levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the TESOL career. Pennington (1991, 1992), Pennington and Riley (1991) and Pennington and Ho (1995) found that TESOL teachers typically express moderate or high job satisfaction in connection with the intrinsic values of teaching work, while registering low job satisfaction in connection with pay and particularly with opportunities for advancement. In Australia, a survey by McKnight (1992) reached similar conclusions, with positive intrinsic motivation towards TESOL work being coupled with its lack of professional recognition.

## Huberman's phases

The schematic model devised by Huberman to represent the professional life cycle of schoolteachers consists of relatively clear-cut phases, although Huberman states that it is a "fragmentary, embryonic and, above all highly speculative and normative sequence" (Huberman, 1993, p. 3).

Table 2: Model sequences of the teacher career cycle: a schematic model

School teachers: Huberman (1993, ref. pp. 244-247)
Survival and discovery (1-3 years' experience)
Stabilisation (4-6 years' experience)
Experimentation & diversity/renewal and reform (7-18 years' experience)
Self-doubt following stabilization/Reassessment following disillusionment with attempts at reform (7-25 years' experience)
Internalization or serenity and affective distance following period of self-doubt (not time-bound) Less activism and less commitment in pursuit of greater serenity in second half of career (19-30 years' experience)
Greater caution (conservatism) towards reform/energetic/open/committed and optimistic (30-40 years' experience)
Focusing down <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive focusing</li> <li>• Negative focusing</li> <li>• Disenchantment (bitter or serene)</li> </ul> (34-40 years' experience)

## TESOL phases model

The TESOL groups in my studies did not demonstrate such clear-cut phases and appeared to go through multiple "mini-cycles" as well as maxi-cycles.

Table 3: Model of career cycles for Geneva and Sydney TESOLs combined

Career cycles of Geneva and Sydney TESOLs (1993-1996)		
Positive phases	Reassessment/training phases	Negative phases
<b>Discovery and experimentation</b> Survival and discovery (1-2 years' experience) Experimentation (2-7 yrs) Further experimentation/more confidence (2-6 yrs) Experimentation/new challenges (2-16 yrs; 4-15 yrs) Second wind/new challenges (11-24 yrs)	<b>Training</b> Training (1-2 yrs; 3-8 yrs) Further training (3-16 yrs; 8-19 yrs)  <b>Exiting and re-entry</b> Exit and re-entry (1-6 yrs)  <b>Reflective phases</b> Back to teaching (5-8 yrs) Stocktaking/reassessment (3-6 yrs; 7-18 yrs; 7-25 yrs)	Doubts (2-11 yrs) Disillusioned (1-9 yrs)  <b>Lack of commitment</b> Uncommitted (2-6 yrs)
<b>Stability</b> Stabilization (3-9 yrs; 11-19 yrs; 8-20 yrs)		
<b>Acceptance</b> Acceptance/balance (6-28 yrs)		
↑      ↑      ↑		
Contextual factors: professional and personal		

In summary, apart from the beginning phase of *survival* and *discovery*, the major phases identified by the TESOL groups were recurring for many TESOLs and difficult to place in a linear sequence. In contrast, the phases in Huberman's model could generally be attributed to specific time-periods of the career. For example, *stabilization* typically occurred during years 4-6 of the cycle, while for TESOL respondents this phase could occur at any time during the career cycle, and often there were recurring instances of it when a respondent changed jobs, countries, or schools many times in a lifetime. While the TESOL studies did not include respondents with more than 30 years' experience, the incidence of recurring cycles typical of many TESOLs showed no signs of abating further along the career path for those with more than 20 years' experience.

## Contextual factors

The TESOL respondents' career paths were influenced by specific environmental and contextual factors, both personal and professional. This finding verifies the contention made by Fessler and Christensen (1992) and Huberman (1993) that environmental factors played a role in career paths. When positive, these environmental and contextual factors laid the ground for job satisfaction in the long-term, but, when negative, they tended to lead to dissatisfaction. This is consistent with Herzberg et al.'s (1959) two-factor theory. For example, professional development opportunities may in the long-term lead to promotion and growth and greater intrinsic job satisfaction, or it can raise expectations which are never realized, while contextual change factors can lead either to job satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

## Professional factors

### General working conditions

The general working conditions of the profession affected respondents in both settings. However, there were similarities and differences between the two TESOL settings. Geneva respondents had a peculiar set of circumstances, common to non-Anglophone settings but which were not found in Sydney. They mentioned isolation, some because of working alone in a small town or city at some part of their career with not much contact with others in the field, others because of the freelance nature of their work. The latter were required to travel from company to company giving classes to the employees, but rarely went to the TESOL school or interacted with colleagues. Physical conditions (including space and room allocation) in these companies were often unsatisfactory.

Inadequate working conditions also included lack of fringe benefits, superannuation, and sick or recreation leave. Many of the freelance Geneva respondents had no work contract and were paid by the hour. For others, contracts were restricted to one year. Salary scales were either non-existent or negotiated on an individual basis with the director.

In Sydney, the working conditions were generally better, with a teachers' award, established salary scales, and sick and recreation pay. Some schools offered ongoing contracts or even tenure, but most teachers started out on a freelance basis.

### School management issues

Respondents from both Sydney and Geneva mentioned school management issues. These related either to dissatisfaction with the attitude or ethics of the manager of the school or with the management of the school generally. In some cases, this affected the general attitude of the staff member over a long period of time contributing to dissatisfaction with aspects of the career, while in other cases it led to career exit on a temporary or permanent basis.

### Change

Change was a constant feature in many TESOL respondents' lives. Some changed country for a range of professional or personal reasons, which in some cases entailed a period of time when they would take a step backwards in their career before moving ahead again. This tended to give them a chance to take stock and was a valuable part of the process of professional development for some.

Change also led for some to a period of uncertainty, dissatisfaction, or even exit from the field. Industry booms

and crises affected respondents in both TESOL settings. These had a profound effect on many respondents, often precipitating a change of country, workplace, position or responsibilities, and causing some to leave the field. Most of those interviewed had overcome any hardships and had proceeded to more challenging and satisfying outcomes.

## Career satisfaction

Huberman's study identified two major factors for career satisfaction:

1. The teachers who undertake pedagogical "tinkering", where they experiment at a small level in their classrooms and in their teaching, or with grading systems, are more likely to be satisfied later on in their careers than their peers who had been heavily involved in schoolwide or districtwide projects. So, tending one's own private garden, pedagogically speaking, seems to pay off more in the long run than land reform. (Huberman, 1989).
2. Teachers typically mentioned that their best years included specific classes they had taught where students were engaged in purposeful activities, or students who had become motivated from being previously apathetic. Thus, Huberman concludes that teachers feel most satisfied when their students improve as a result of their combined efforts.

Despite their overall general career satisfaction, the TESOL respondents in both studies by Waites (1999) appeared to have more numerous *moments of doubt* than secondary school teachers. Working conditions were the main reasons for moments of doubt for TESOL teachers. This is not surprising considering the security of schoolteachers' working conditions compared with the high levels of casual and contract work in the TESOL field. Even in Sydney where the conditions were much better than in Geneva, one quarter of respondents mentioned working conditions as leading to moments of doubt.

A change in the economy or a situation like the recent Covid pandemic could lead to a downturn in the industry, which could lead to retrenchment or to TESOLs having to seek work elsewhere. They may therefore enter one mini-cycle, going through a beginning phase, then one of *experimentation* and *diversification* as they "learn the ropes", followed by a brief phase of *stabilization* before the next change, which may lead them to a period of *reassessment* before moving into a new mini-cycle. Many experienced dramatic changes in working conditions, leading to *stocktaking*, *reassessment*, sometimes burnout, and often the need for training.

Although change, turmoil, and uncertainty may be thought to cause disillusionment, cynicism, and negative exits from the career, conversely, these adverse environmental factors appear to lead many TESOLs to resilience, optimism, positive coping, and acceptance of challenge, and ultimately to more positive career endings.

Huberman's research and my findings are useful for teacher trainers and school administrators to recognize that teachers may need different types of professional development according to the phase they currently find themselves in. In addition, it is worth recalling that "tinkering" and discovering activities and methods that suit individual teachers is a more valuable activity for long term career satisfaction, rather than industry or schoolwide projects (Huberman, 1993; Woodward, 2013). Thus, sharing of teaching ideas among teachers, which is an easily achieved ongoing professional development activity to encourage, could be more valuable than higher level training. And at a time when teaching is radically changing to include hybrid and online modes, exchanging ideas for classroom or webinar implementation will be welcomed by many who may have had to reinvent their courses on the run during the recent Covid pandemic.

*"Adverse environmental factors appear to lead many TESOLs to resilience, optimism, positive coping, and acceptance of challenge, and ultimately to more positive career endings."*

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A smiling man in a grey t-shirt and blue apron holds a tablet displaying a vocational English course interface. To his right, the large title 'CAREER PATHS' is displayed in a stylized, blue, brain-maze pattern font. Below it, the tagline 'IMPROVE YOUR VOCATIONAL ENGLISH AT YOUR OWN PACE!' is written in a bold, sans-serif font. To the right of the tagline, seven book covers for the 'Career Paths' series are shown, each with a different vocational theme: Hotels & Catering, Cooking, Logistics, Sales and Marketing, Management II, and Real Estate. At the bottom, the text 'VIEW THE COMPLETE LIST OF TITLES AT [expresspublishing.co.uk/esp](http://expresspublishing.co.uk/esp)' is displayed.

Dr Patricia Daniels

# Freelance English language teachers' informal learning through open educational practices in Switzerland

## Abstract

This article shares findings from a small-scale qualitative study that investigated freelance English language teachers' engagement with and informal learning through open educational practices (OEP) in Switzerland. Results indicate that engagement with OEP can contribute to freelancers' informal learning and development in a meaningful way and can lead to transformations in classroom practices, which participants claim have a positive impact on student learning, and motivation.



## Biography

**Dr Patricia Daniels** is a freelance English language teacher who has taught in Switzerland since 1992. For over a decade, she has taught EFL at tertiary level with a focus on tourism, hospitality, and business management. Her research interests include open educational resources, open educational practices, and language teacher professional development.

## Introduction

There are increasing expectations on language teachers to integrate *information communication technologies* (ICTs) into their teaching practices (Stickler, Hampel, & Emke, 2020), as well as relevant resources that provide learners with greater exposure to richer, authentic, and collaborative learning experiences (Collins & Muñoz, 2016; Kessler, 2018). To leverage these opportunities, language teachers need awareness of these possibilities and require relevant digital literacy skills, and technical and pedagogical knowledge, which often requires support and training (Germain-Rutherford & Ernest, 2015; Karamifar et al., 2019).

Freelance English language teachers (freelancers) in Switzerland are hourly paid teachers whose work depends on student numbers; hence, teaching hours can be unpredictable. Freelancers often manage multiple teaching jobs in a variety of settings outside mainstream education. This can involve coping with, and adapting to, a variety of contextual issues as they shift from one setting to another, e.g. access to relevant teaching resources, digital devices and internet connectivity; varying workplace cultures which can impact teacher autonomy; and continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities. These precarious employment conditions have pervaded the global English language teaching (ELT) industry for decades (Breshears, 2019), and still pose many challenges today (Walsh, 2019).

In the context of teacher learning in the further education sector, Broad (2015) notes that such precarious conditions can hamper a lack of integration into the workplace and limit the building of networks which are valuable for CPD. Similarly, the precarity of freelancers' employment conditions in Switzerland can leave them feeling isolated and unsupported in their CPD. Having opportunities to engage with

fellow teachers at work is important because it enables them to discuss aspects of their teaching practices, share relevant resources, collaborate, and exchange knowledge, all of which can potentially contribute to their informal learning (Daniels, 2021). Such learning opportunities are critical for freelancers' development and well-being and should be encouraged and promoted by employers irrespective of the teachers' employment status.

## Exploring viable informal CPD opportunities for freelancers

Teacher CPD is recognized as an important ongoing process that occurs throughout teachers' careers and is a complex combination of different types of activities and programmes, i.e. formal, non-formal, and informal. Although there has been extensive research about numerous aspects of teacher CPD, top-down formal approaches are often criticized (McClearney, 2019) for not meeting teachers' learning needs. Research has shown that for teacher CPD to be effective and meaningful, it should, for example, involve teachers actively in the process, enable opportunities for experimentation, collaboration, and reflective practice, and appropriate support should be provided (Daniels, 2021). Partly in response to criticisms of formal CPD, it has been argued that teachers' informal learning should be investigated to better understand how teachers can be supported in CPD that is meaningful and sustainable (Evans, 2018). This means exploring how a teacher's informal learning is shaped by engaging in everyday teaching tasks and social interactions with their learners and fellow teachers, whether in face-to-face or online contexts.

As a freelancer who has taught English as a foreign language (EFL) in Switzerland since 1992, I was concerned about the lack of support and training for freelancers, and was interested in exploring viable informal learning opportunities as an alternative to top-down formal CPD approaches. Furthermore, I wanted to investigate how freelancers could provide learners with richer learning experiences. My interest in freelancers' teaching practices and their CPD provided the impetus for this study which investigated freelancers' engagement with and learning through *open educational practices* (OEP) in Switzerland.

This article presents findings relating to the research participants' informal learning through OEP. It provides insight into the skills and knowledge they developed, how they developed them, and briefly reports on how this impacted freelancers and their teaching practices.

## How open educational practices can benefit freelancers

In the context of this study, OEP refer to teaching practices linked to the use of *open educational resources* (OER) as well as freelancers' use of open participatory technologies, e.g. social networking tools, YouTube and Flickr, for teaching and teacher learning. OER are commonly understood as materials in any medium, that are free of



cost, and openly licensed so that end-users can take part in activities as described in Wiley's (2014) 5R framework, (i.e. retain, reuse, revise, remix, and redistribute). Taking part in OEP can facilitate peer learning, sharing practices, and provide opportunities for collaboration and community building (Malik, Heyman-Schrum, & Johri, 2019; Zourou, 2016).

Creative Commons (CC) licences are widely used to license resources, and enable content creators to choose between a range of permissions which impact how content can be used in diverse contexts. For example, content released with a *by attribution* CC licence (CC BY) is optimal for language teachers because they are permitted to adapt content and freely share modified versions in digital or non-digital formats. By comparison, content released with a *no derivatives* CC licence (CC ND) does not permit practices such as revising or remixing, and consequently limits how teachers and learners can use such resources.

For language teachers, a significant benefit of OER is that they can be adapted to provide learners with resources that are authentic, personalized, and current (Thoms & Thoms, 2014) to enrich learning experiences. Additionally, open licensing removes the ambiguity that can happen when resources are made available on educational or non-educational websites without an open licence. Sharing teaching resources online and labelling them as *downloadables* can confuse end-users. Does the permission to download extend to adapting and sharing practices? Anecdotal evidence during the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the challenges some language teachers faced involving copyright issues. They were uncertain about what digital resources they could use online and what they were legally permitted to do with them.

In terms of learning benefits for language teachers, research has shown that engagement with OEP can improve pedagogical and digital literacy skills (Borthwick & Gallagher-Brett, 2014; Pulker & Kukulska-Hulme, 2020), promote critical self-reflection, and improve teachers' confidence (Gallardo, Heiser, & McLaughlin, 2017). Comas-Quinn and Borthwick (2015) discuss the complexity of decision-making processes that are involved as language teachers evaluate, adapt, remix, and use OER. They argue that through these practices, teachers are often reflecting and re-evaluating which can contribute to their learning.

However, engaging in OEP is not without its challenges. Teachers first need to reflect on what it entails to work openly with participatory tools and technologies, be aware of OER and CC licensing, and understand the affordances of *information and communication technologies* (ICTs) and how they can be used effectively in their teaching practices with appropriate pedagogies. This requires various literacies and types of knowledge (Hood & Littlejohn, 2017), and support.

## Methodology

This small-scale qualitative study took a case study approach and used an online survey (46 respondents) and semi-structured interviews (4 males and 11 females) to gather data. The research participants were freelance English language teachers who were members of the same English teaching association in Switzerland.

Participation in the study was voluntary and interviewees were selected based on specific criteria. Freelancers who had completed the online survey were invited to volunteer for a semi-structured interview. Based on their survey responses, volunteers who reported taking part in one or more of the following criteria were recruited for an interview:

- OER-based practices
- digital networking practices
- using open participatory platforms for teaching and/or learning.

The interviewees' ages ranged from 45 to 65+, and their EFL teaching experience ranged from 11 to 44 years. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) was used as a data analysis method to code data and generate themes and sub-themes.

## Findings

This section summarizes key findings from the study relating to freelancers' informal learning through OEP. Overall, data analysis showed that numerous factors underpinned participants' motives for taking part in OEP, i.e. their assumptions, values, and beliefs about language teaching and teacher CPD, learners' needs, and diverse constraints which enabled or hindered engagement with OEP.

Constraints on OEP included:

- lack of access to digital devices and internet connectivity
- lack of teacher agency and autonomy to use supplementary resources and ICTs
- limited or no awareness of OER and CC licensing, and
- inadequate digital literacy skills.

In contexts where these issues did not hamper participants' engagement with OEP, they described feeling motivated and empowered to supplement and adapt materials, and integrate ICTs. They also described in detail how these activities contributed to their CPD.

Participants' skills and knowledge development varied depending on whether they engaged in practices linked to content (OER or other materials, i.e. non-OER), or to social practices facilitated through social media tools, and open technologies. When describing how they learned through content-based practices, freelancers did not make a distinction between whether resources were OER or other materials that were available and accessible on the Web but not openly licensed. Table 1 summarizes the skills and knowledge that freelancers reported learning through OEP, and the informal learning strategies that contributed to their learning.

Table 1 - Informal learning through OEP: Skills, knowledge, and learning strategies.

Themes	Skills and knowledge developed through OEP (sub-themes)	Informal learning strategies (sub-themes)
Learning as an individual process (content-based practices)	- pedagogical knowledge - content knowledge - digital literacy skills - critical awareness raised	- reflection - learning by doing - benchmarking
Learning as a social process	- pedagogical knowledge - content knowledge - digital literacy skills	

(Based on Daniels, 2021)

Individual learning processes include interacting with OER or other materials for teaching, and teacher learning. Participants described how they learned through evaluating, adapting, remixing, and reusing resources (educational and non-educational) from a variety of digital platforms, including materials shared by teachers.

Overwhelmingly, OER and other resources were used to:

- supplement coursebooks
- broaden their range of teaching materials
- gain ideas and inspiration
- provide students with relevant and authentic resources
- use other teachers' resources as a benchmark, and
- engage in CPD.

Social processes include practices where participants described learning from and/or with other educators facilitated through digital networking practices, and open technologies. Such practices included asynchronous or synchronous communication, engagement in collaborative tasks, and sharing content or teaching experiences. The majority of the respondents used these tools to:

- enhance their CPD
- gain ideas and inspiration
- network with other teachers, and
- share content and expertise.

Findings from the interviewees provided deeper insight into the types of knowledge and skills gained from taking part in OEP, and are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2 - Description of knowledge and skills gained through OEP.**

Learning and developing what?	Description of knowledge and skills.	Number of interviewees who described specific knowledge types.
Pedagogical knowledge	Described as learning about theory or teaching methods, and/or approaches.	13
Content knowledge	Described as learning about a specific topic and/or language teaching domain.	12
Digital literacy skills	Described as the development of technical skills, and improved knowledge (pedagogical and technical) about using specific digital tools.	8
Critical awareness raised	Described as being more critical when evaluating the quality and suitability of OER and non-OER for teaching.	3

(Based on Daniels, 2021)

Taking part in OEP enabled participants to broaden their pedagogical and content knowledge, improve their digital literacy skills, and a minority of interviewees reported that such practices made them more critical when evaluating online materials in general.

OEP provided significant and varied learning opportunities for freelancers to critically reflect on numerous aspects of their teaching practices, e.g. on their pedagogical approaches and teaching methods, and how they design, adapt, and deliver materials. The interviewees described how these practices fostered experimentation with materials, teaching methods, and the integration of ICTs into their teaching contexts, and enabled them to compare their teaching methods and materials to those of fellow educators. Comparing their teaching practices and competencies to other teachers was used for benchmarking purposes and helped to confirm where participants were positioned in relation to current language teaching practices. Benchmarking also served to inspire and stimulated reflection about what changes participants could make in their teaching contexts, which in some cases prompted self-directed learning.

The informal learning strategies, i.e. reflection, learning by doing, and benchmarking, were described as interrelated processes that contributed to participants' learning. The following quote illustrates this when one participant discussed learning about teaching methods from social media discussions.

"I think about it and ... relate it to my teaching. I ask myself, 'can I do this or am I doing this already?' Maybe, there's something I learn to improve my teaching. To test it, or check it, or to learn, I also need texts because it's a process."

Similarly, the following quote shows the interrelatedness of these learning strategies and typifies how OEP can provide informal learning opportunities for freelancers. This participant described learning from other teachers who openly share ideas via digital platforms:

"It's trying out the ideas but also thinking about whether it's going to work with my students. It's both things ... it provokes you into thinking about other things, and relationships with concepts so you can think about that and your students."

The interviewees reported that OEP play a significant role in their ongoing CPD and that the ensuing development has made them feel

more confident and professional. They appreciate the numerous learning possibilities and networking opportunities afforded through OEP and value the content and expertise shared by other language teachers on diverse platforms.

The new skills and knowledge gained through OEP have led to changes in their classrooms in terms of experimenting with new teaching methods and introducing relevant ICTs and authentic content. Participants described how these changes have positively impacted student motivation and learning.

## Discussion and recommendations

This study provides insight into freelancers' OEP in Switzerland and aids in understanding what practices contribute to their informal learning in a meaningful way. The findings demonstrate that OEP can act as a catalyst for the development of different types of knowledge and skills which can improve freelancers' confidence and sense of professionalism, and lead to positive changes in their teaching practices. Further, it highlights the conditions and infrastructure that are needed to support freelancers in their CPD, and in their teaching settings. Although this is a small-scale case study, the findings have a broad application and are transferable to similar settings with implications for diverse stakeholders, e.g. freelancers, other teachers who work in similar conditions, employees of freelancers, teacher trainers, teaching associations, and publishers.

Whether participants in this study consciously chose to use OER in their teaching contexts or not, the majority regularly adapt materials to provide students with authentic and relevant resources. This practice is underpinned by the belief that personalized and localized materials have a positive impact on student motivation and learning. Participants' beliefs and assumptions about student learning acted as a driver for them to engage in OEP and to experiment with various open technologies and materials from the Web, and included practices such as adapting, reviewing, remixing, sharing, and creating resources. Participants integrated modified materials and ICTs into their teaching contexts to supplement or replace coursebook materials, even in settings where standardized resources were prescribed, and where teacher agency and autonomy were hampered.

Participants' informal learning benefited from their experimentation with a mixed ecology of materials (OER and other resources) and ICTs, and from engaging in digital networking practices that provided a window into the teaching practices of others. The affordances of the latter supported peer learning, sharing practices, and networking. In this volume, Waites (2022) also reminds us about the importance of "tinkering" for teacher development and satisfaction, when she compares her research findings from 1999 to an earlier Huberman (1989) study on teacher career cycles. Similarly, Hood (2018) highlights how important it is for teachers to actively engage with resources, explaining that through a complex array of tasks such as selecting, modifying, and implementing materials, teachers develop new knowledge relevant to their learning needs. However, she argues that to benefit from these tasks and the knowledge created, teachers need relevant skills and competencies, which requires appropriate support and guidance.

The study reported here also found that a lack of appropriate skills and knowledge constrained freelancers' engagement with OEP, e.g. inadequate digital literacy skills and pedagogical knowledge, a lack of awareness of OER, and limited knowledge of CC licensing and copyright issues. In some cases, structural constraints such as restricted or no access to digital infrastructure prevented freelancers from using ICTs and a broad range of resources, which is an issue that critically needs addressing in workplaces. At a minimum, internet connectivity should be available and accessible to freelancers and their learners. To engage in OEP and benefit from valuable learning opportunities, teacher autonomy and agency need to be respected. It has long been acknowledged that teachers are change agents (Day, 1999), but how can they transform their practices to support learners if prescriptive policies hamper their work as language professionals?

Based on the findings, it is recommended that capacity building be offered and tailored to support freelancers' CPD and ideally provide opportunities for reflection, learning by doing, and benchmarking. Employers of freelancers could involve them in discussions about their CPD requirements and gather feedback on how best to design and implement activities and events, e.g. tailored workshops,

hands-on experimentation in-situ, and collaborative projects with fellow teachers to design OER and create local resource repositories in digital and non-digital formats. Overall, freelancers must be given time and flexible opportunities to interact with fellow professionals at work, and be encouraged to create and share resources, as well as technical and pedagogical expertise.

To aid freelancers to structure their CPD effectively, relevant stakeholders could raise awareness of the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (see Redecker, 2017). This model can help teachers understand which pedagogical and technical competencies they require to teach effectively in their contexts, and how best to achieve these goals (Caena & Redecker, 2019). The robust pedagogical component of this model can assist teachers in improving their pedagogical competencies so that they feel confident evaluating and integrating ICTs. Additionally, freelancers should be encouraged to join local language teaching associations and teacher groups where peer learning, social networking, and approaches to CPD abound and are often a mix of online and face-to-face events.

Knowledge of freelancers' OEP and informal learning in Switzerland also has implications for ELT publishers and policymakers. There is

a need for openly licensed ELT materials in editable formats so teachers can adapt, localize, and redistribute them. Participants who teach in specialized domains, e.g. legal English, particularly reported that they found it challenging and time-consuming to find appropriate OER that suited the Swiss context. Going forward, it is a chance for publishers to be more innovative and to re-assess the design and purpose of coursebooks, accompanying supplementary materials, and content repositories.

## Conclusion

Freelancers are learning valuable skills and knowledge from their engagement with OEP which they are using in their teaching contexts to motivate students and enhance their learning. The development and effective utilization of these new skills and knowledge is reportedly contributing to freelancers' sense of professionalism. Taking part in such practices is a choice and involves complex decision-making as well as relevant knowledge and skills. It follows that to benefit from these informal learning opportunities, freelancers need appropriate support and conditions that empower them to teach autonomously and confidently, now and in the future.

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# Transitioning and evolving as a teacher of English as a foreign language



Neil Bullock

## Abstract

Career development for English teachers can have many paths, but continual professional development is key to any route we take. Neil Bullock highlights some of the key stages in his development as an English teacher over more than 20 years and reflects on the positive effects continuing professional development has had throughout his career.



## Biography

**Neil Bullock** is an English teacher, teacher trainer, and testing specialist working in professional and occupational domains, based in Vaud, Switzerland. He specializes in speaking and listening skills in language for aeronautical communication between pilots and air traffic control, and writes and presents regularly on testing and teaching issues. He joined ETAS in 2006 and is the former Joint Coordinator and Webinar Moderator of IATEFL TEASIG. He is currently the Vice President and General Secretary of the International Civil Aviation English Association.

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I recently replied to a Twitter feed that asked “If you had the chance to live your life again, would you still have become a teacher?”. After only a few minutes’ reflection, my answer was an unequivocal “yes”. I normally eschew such questions as they do seem pointless given we cannot actually change our past, but as this article was about to be written, it did seem slightly more natural to do it.

My “yes” was because my career as a teacher, now rapidly approaching 20 years, has been one of development, evolution, self-discovery, satisfaction, and general professional success. Merging skills and knowledge from my life pre-teaching with my experiences in language learning has enriched me both professionally and personally. I developed skills and knowledge, attained qualifications, met and became long-term friends with many new colleagues, travelled to countries and discovered new worlds, and diversified my professional life into areas beyond teaching. Although I had not realized it at the time, I had become an addict of continuing professional development (CPD). I will expand on that later. This short account will journey through my professional life looking at key overarching themes which I hope you will find both interesting, useful, and maybe even inspiring.

## Transitioning into English language teaching from another field

My involvement in languages started, paradoxically, when I decided to learn French in my early 30s. I was working at my local airport in the UK in the dizzy heights of air traffic control, but company policy had blocked internal promotions in favour of the cheaper option of importing ready-made but less faithful talent from elsewhere. This glass ceiling inspired me to look further afield at developing my interests into essential qualifications, and French was the starting block. Within a few weeks of starting, I had surpassed what I had remembered from a school failure in the subject and loved it. Fast forward to 2002, and approaching the final stages of a Master’s Degree in *Contemporary French Studies*, my airport employer finally decided I was costing them too much and offered me money to go. It was an opportunity that I grabbed with zero hesitation.

Although I was still not 100% sure teaching was what I wanted, I headed to Barcelona to do my Trinity TESOL teaching certificate. The course was intense but fun, and I returned to the UK with a lot of optimism about where I was going. Learning French, teaching English ... France would seem a good option. Thus, in late April 2003 I set off to start work in a small private school in the leafy western suburbs of Paris. The majority of the work was fairly typical Business English in some of the many companies dotted around the area. Whilst I was more than a little nervous about finding my feet in a new professional and personal domain, I did enjoy learning so much about different occupational domains and sectors of my students hitherto completely unknown to me. Although such a new lifestyle is not without its challenges, I went through a huge learning process. A lot of development at this stage though is very implicit. You learn on your feet with your worldly knowledge, common sense, and a dose of luck to get you by.

I learned the importance of preparation, humility, and self-reflection. Knowing your students and their potential language issues helps enormously. If you are not sure you find out. If you are caught unawares, there is always the famous “Ah yes, Jean-Marc, good question, I can tell you but I’d rather you find it out for next week’s lesson, and let’s see if we have the same answer.” Learning on your feet helps build confidence. Showing you had the same problem learning your students’ language, is also good for kudos. I finished my MA dissertation during the Parisian downtime heatwave of summer 2003, and that was pretty much it until the summer of 2004. A visit to a friend in Montreux dangled the carrot of opportunity in front of me again, and I was invited to come and work in Lausanne.

## Moving into English for Specific Purposes

I arrived in snowy Lausanne in January 2005, and like Paris, the majority of my work was Business English either in-company or private students in the school. A move to another school in Geneva in late 2005 also allowed me further evolution with in-house training and a huge set of resources in the school.

In early 2006, a colleague and I talked seriously about setting up our own company offering a bespoke English training service, her in commercial English and me in the specific purposes domain of aviation. We felt we could do better than the schools in terms of value for money and quality, charge less than the competition, and still earn more. The calculation was a no-brainer, but the hard work had only just begun. It needed a lot of footwork to go to new contacts and test the water. There was initial interest and at least I was getting myself known. The first breakthrough came in a chance meeting with my boss and the HR of the Swiss air navigation organization Skyguide. An English teacher who had worked in air traffic control had flashed up on their radar. A call soon followed telling me about a new system being set up to assess language proficiency in English of air traffic controllers and pilots, and as my CV showed my past experience with my current work, would I be interested? The rest is pretty much history, as the saying goes. I said "yes", did the training, also got to know contacts at the Swiss Federal Office of Civil Aviation (FOCA), and was able to set myself up as an independent teacher with my own business, while my colleague did the same with her business coaching.

## Continuing Professional Development

I had started CPD before even learning French when in the early 1990s I decided to invest in a short training course for CV writing and interview techniques. It was one of the best investments I have ever made. It stood me in good stead over the years and also helped my students when they needed a CV or an interview in English.

Now in Switzerland as an *indépendant*, personal development through training, and acquiring qualifications was really important. Of course, being your own boss means you have to pay out of your own pocket, but you can at least decide on what you need. As I was asked to run a test development team by the Swiss FOCA for the testing of pilots' English language proficiency skills, including training the raters and other development team members, backing up my skills and knowledge was key. I took a *Basic Introduction to Language Testing and Assessment* course provided by the Association of Language Testers Europe (ALTE), and was honoured to have the late great Cyril Weir as one of my tutors. I also did an ALTE *Item Writers* course, which essentially is writing exam material, before embarking on a second MA in Applied Linguistics. All this was in parallel to my full-time work, but the positive thing is that you can apply it to your work as you go, and that is so important. My second MA was a real eye-opener as it included the theoretical aspect of practically everything I was doing in my professional life at the time. Every piece of reading, every piece of writing was a voyage of discovery as I was able to much better understand why I was doing what I was, and how this could be transformed into knowledge for my students, trainees, and of course my clients.

I subsequently spent a weekend in Berlin on a cultural awareness training course for Business English teachers, and more recently, attended a teacher training trainer course with NILE in the UK. Building up skills and knowledge is key to professional development and your portfolio provides a background to anything you do.

## Language teacher association roles

As well as the learning, studying, and training, another major part of the puzzle intrinsic to any CPD is joining a professional body, such as a language teaching association. I joined ETAS in early 2006 on the advice of a colleague, which was followed by an IATEFL membership a couple of years later. Attending conferences and meeting new colleagues is enlightening in so many ways and being able to share ideas, stories, issues, and ask for help when needed really underpins the role that such associations play. I also found that the more I studied, trained, and learned the more I felt that I should be actively participating in events, and the associations themselves.

I started presenting and running workshops, which as a freelancer are a large part of your advertising. I led the ETAS Testing Evaluation and Assessment SIG, and latterly, did the same with IATEFL TEASIG, as well as setting up and running regular webinars for the IATEFL SIG for six years. I have now fine-tuned my association roles' work to match my LSP roles as Vice President and General Secretary of the International Civil Aviation English Association (ICAEA). Membership of associations allows you to build up your contacts, underpinning your professional reputation, and aiding your continued development.

## Other non-teaching roles

Over time, developing skills in other areas such as testing and assessment and specific purpose language has meant that non-teaching work has also developed. I now do regular item writing and editing for clients, run training courses for teachers of Aviation English, and curriculum development for specific purposes language teaching. I have also been a keen materials writer in the field of Aviation English. Although some commercial material is available, it is sadly lacking in many areas and now seems quite outdated. I also write regularly for journals and publications, including now a third book chapter, this time on the subject of language assessment literacy (LAL).

As well as the webinars for IATEFL TEASIG, I was invited to join a regular podcast with three colleagues to talk about CPD. What is fun is that we all have varying ideas and work in slightly different areas of education, so we can bring to the show a whole mix of ideas, anecdotes, and advice.

## CPD in a time of Covid

Our education environment has changed dramatically since the beginning of 2020 with the global pandemic. It has been a challenge on many fronts for all of us as the dynamics of our work have changed, some forever, and we are still evolving. To a large extent it was back to surviving on your feet. As time has gone on, I have been able to do further training which has helped me adapt. One course was for virtual instructor-led training, essentially teaching a class virtually, live, while the second was how to manage asynchronous learning – or where learners do most of the work by themselves, and the teacher/tutor facilitates and keeps in contact throughout but without any direct online live instruction. I have learned so much more about technology and benefited from teaching new students further afield, hitherto not possible with face-to-face teaching. Ironic given I eschewed IT back in the 1990s in favour of learning French.

More recently, as a final piece of the professional jigsaw, I decided to embark on a PhD. Answering some burning theoretical questions seemed a logical conclusion to my professional life. After two years of preparatory study and research, I decided it was not for me. I weighed up what it would entail and decided that the investment of time and money to prove something, which in six years' time may well be out of date, could not be justified. I knew I had achieved more than I could have hoped for and there was no need to finally prove myself, and the decision was liberating. I knew that my career has been no mean feat and I have loved every minute of it, but you also need to know when to say "stop".

## A final word

I am not quite ready to shred my well-thumbed course and theory books nor my lesson plans, as I still enjoy and benefit immensely from what I do. At least now though, I can savour what I have done with immense pride, and leave more time for my partner, Béatrice – who has been massively supportive throughout my CPD journey – our grandchildren, combined with continued cycling, travel, and other of life's great pleasures. Professional development and transitions demand time, effort, luck, and, yes, some money, but they are immensely rewarding. Would I change anything if I had my life over again? Why would I?

# Engineering to communication coaching

Chan Park

## Abstract

The author has learned and benefited from the importance of communication in his career as a NASA engineer, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) researcher, and tango dance teacher. As an English communication coach, he enjoys sharing his experience with non-native engineers who wish to improve their English communication skills.



## Biography

**Chan Park** is a CELTA-qualified teacher, engineer, and tango dance instructor with expertise in many fields, including university training in science and engineering, 19 years of engineering experience at NASA, patent law practice, and research on renewable energy sources, energy storage systems, and smart grid. For four years he lived in Buenos Aires, where he could immerse himself in the traditional Argentinean tango culture. He is today recognized as a dancer and teacher in tango communities worldwide. In Buenos Aires, he directed and produced his documentary film titled *Tango Your Life*. For years he has offered the workshop based on his concept of tango in more than 22 countries.

Forty years ago, a young man from Seoul, Korea, landed at Los Angeles airport (LAX) to pursue his academic goal of completing Bachelor of Science, Master of Science, and even PhD degrees in engineering. Now, as a coach, he is happy to help other engineers improve their English communication skills and accelerate their careers in their new homes in English-speaking countries.

The young man is me, Chan Park. Although I failed to realize my academic goal fully, I have enjoyed a colourful career beyond any engineer's wildest dream. I spent 19 exciting years at NASA, carrying out interesting projects related to the Space Shuttle, satellites, and technology transfer, to name a few. While at NASA, I practised the patent laws as a US Patent Agent, equivalent to a patent attorney in European patent law. I researched renewable energy at Zurich University of Applied Sciences for four years, publishing several papers on the topic.

Besides professional achievements in engineering and technology, I have pursued my personal interests in full swing. I published a book titled *Tango Zen: Walking Dance Meditation*, combining Zen principles, the discipline of martial arts, and basic tango movements. I travelled to more than 22 countries to conduct Tango Zen workshops. I relocated to Buenos Aires for four years to experience the cultural essence of the dance. I agree with how many of my friends and colleagues describe my decision between career and interest. I jumped off the ship of the prestigious job to dance every night in the mecca of Argentine Tango, and every minute was worth it! While residing in Buenos Aires, I directed and produced a documentary film titled *Tango Your Life*, describing intimate stories of tango as culture, music, dance, friendship, love, and daily living in Buenos Aires.

While touring Europe as a travelling teacher in 2009, I met my wife, Regina, and settled in Switzerland after marrying her in 2013.

I am frequently asked, "Why are you pursuing being an English communication coach when you have a wide range of personal and professional interests?"

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# A straight road to happiness or endless diversions?

## Abstract

Elsbeth Mäder shares her experience and insight gained during her long and fascinating career in EFL.



## Biography

**Elsbeth Mäder** first trained as a Swiss primary school teacher before studying English at Zürich University, where she earned her Lic Phil I (equivalent to a Master degree), and a Diplom für Höheres Lehramt 1978/1979 (qualification for teaching at Swiss 'grammar schools').

This article was originally published in the  
2004 Winter ETAS Journal

The first signpost certainly didn't point to a motorway and straight roads aren't that frequent in our mountainous country either. Yet from my early days as one of the 50 first class pupils of Fr. Gloor, a kind, motherly, middle-aged woman, I could clearly see my destination. Little did I know then that more than forty years later I would still be on the road.

On my long, interesting journey there were and still are a few obstacles, many milestones, and of course a large variety of fellow travellers.

## Obstacles:

Only one of them might have become a road block: my fear of exposing myself. Fortunately, my inhibitions were matched by my determination to reach my goal.

Other obstacles could be looked upon as challenges. There was that class of teenagers who gave me hell on my first day as a substitute teacher. I was able to see a pupil's name (Emanuel) as a sign that God would be with me and help me through the four months with this unruly bunch of small blessings. Two years later Emanuel had changed his name!

## Milestones

At a very young age, I started off as a primary school teacher in a tiny village in the Freiamt (Aargau), where I was called *Fr. Lehrerin* by everybody, not just my 36 pupils. The daunting task of managing Year 4, 5, and 6 all in one classroom, always preparing three parallel lessons without the help of modern technology and correcting piles of copybooks eventually led to another milestone. After two and a half years, I fled to England to become a student again myself at the Swan School in Oxford.

Diversions followed (Zürich university, several substituting jobs, Cardiff as a Swiss assistant, and last but not least: starting a family) and eventually led to my latest milestone, my present position as a teacher, school owner, manager, and secretary.

Elsbeth Mäder

## Fellow travellers

Fr. Gloor, who is still lovingly remembered at class reunions, was sort of an initiator. Throughout my childhood, teacher training school and university, there were excellent, mediocre and down-right bad teachers, who all influenced me somehow. None of them would deter me from my ultimate goal: to become one of them.

For example, my experiences with an irascible *Mittelstufen* teacher struggling with a large class made me swear never to resort to physical power. That way negative and positive role models somehow guided me on the way I had chosen.

My love of and fascination with the English language, and my decision to start teaching it, was awakened by Hazel-Anne Swan, a truly inspiring teacher.

The way teachers influenced my choice of career, other teachers were just as crucial for my keeping it up. There were Tim Murphy, Mark Fletcher, and Jean Rüdiger; three especially charismatic teachers, who motivated me to further develop my talents, take risks experimenting, and also confirmed that I was on the right track.

And there were all you ETAS and IATEFL people out there who taught in workshops, were open to meet new colleagues, and took time to talk to me.

Last but not least, there are the many pupils and students who in one way or other have inspired me to keep on teaching and take up new challenges, ranging from the little girl (one of a class of forty), who walked past the school house on a Sunday and told her parents: "Fortunately, it's Monday again tomorrow and I can go back to school!" to an adult evening student who arrives worn out from a hard day and leaves saying that he is feeling better now, to a group of students who support one of their colleagues through a very hard time.

The fact that my road has been far from straight, but has presented unexpected turnings with new challenges time and again is probably one of the reasons for my continued journey. The most important one, however, is the fact that "en route" I keep on learning from my fellow travellers, teachers, and students alike. Amazing, how they managed to tickle the genes passed on from my grandfather, an enthusiastic inspiring primary school teacher I never had the privilege to meet.

# Be open, flexible, and curious



After that first transition from primary school teacher to teacher of EFL described in an article for ETAS Journal many years ago (*A straight road to happiness or endless diversions?*), transitions in my long career as a teacher (and private school owner) followed. Never could I have imagined, especially as a non-native teacher, that eventually I would not only teach General English, but also coach students for Cambridge exams up to Proficiency level, help some students reach a higher IELTS score and prepare others for various BEC level exams, as well as teach a wide variety of ESP.

Tim Murphy's advice way back in 1995 in an unforgettable ETAS summer school in Kartause, Ittingen, certainly proved true: *If you want to learn something, teach it!* and so did *Dare to try!* originally intended for students. What helped even more were students who somehow trusted me to be able to cater to their individual needs. Tailoring the content of my courses to whatever students required eventually developed into my basic unique selling proposition: tailor-made with a personal touch.

Among my special requirement students from a wide range of fields were:

- Business English students working for a variety of companies in diverse functions and fields (purchase, sales, accountancy, research and development, human resources, administration, and logistics).
- Engineers (chemical and mechanical)
- Professional rider needing English for his coaching sessions
- Mountain guide offering team building events also to international companies
- Specialist in photovoltaics
- Telecom technician required to communicate in English with a colleague from Poland.
- Nurses
- Primary school teachers wanting conversation and input in education matters as well as topics beyond their immediate concerns as teachers.
- Pilots as well as an air traffic controller needing to reach or keep up a certain level of English according to International Civil Aviation Organization requirements.
- IT specialists
- Shop assistant in a fashion store with some regular English native-speaker customers
- A psychiatrist originally wanting a short brush-up for the social side of international conferences and staying on "for the human side" of our classes.

Elsbeth Mäder

## Things I learnt by the way:

- ESP as well as Business English means specific jargon that students may or may not already know, but it is fine for the teacher to learn it while teaching.
- The students know their matter, so they are not only at the receiving end. This fact is especially good for students who, to start with, may feel fairly incompetent as language learners, but can teach their language teacher matters related to their profession.
- Teaching certain structures may help some students understand more complicated texts in their field that may be beyond their actual productive language level, e.g. a grasp of modals was necessary for a very low-level geriatric nurse who needed to read English articles for some further education.
- Concerning available teaching material, I soon realized how field related coursebooks can soon be outdated due to technological developments but that, thanks to the internet, relevant sites can provide material that we can adapt to various students' language needs.
- No matter what specific coaching students need, your most important job always is to help students keep motivated, gain more confidence in their language skills, and eventually become independent learners.
- Fellow ETAS and IATEFL teachers, who shared their experiences in various fields in journals and at conferences, gave me new ideas as well as confirmation that in my way of catering to my students' needs, I was on the right track.
- As a side effect of all these transitions, I got insights into all kinds of fields and became much more aware of the hard work done to make our own lives in our overcivilized world so comfortable. For example, the necessary research needed for the following fields, to name but a few:
  - the chemical research and processes involved in lining food cans with white paint, or
  - the necessary procedures concerning technical problems related to our taken-for-granted use of tele-communication, or
  - the logistics behind the staging of exhibitions of valuable works of art, or
  - the importance of ATCs for flying safe in spite of hotspots at our local airport.

Let me conclude with what helped me in the course of my transitions: *Dare to try! Be open, flexible, curious! And keep learning!*



# Teacher training is ... insightful

## Abstract

The transition from teacher to teacher training has been insightful. This article presents a personal reflection on my experience as a teacher who has recently transitioned to teacher training and has discovered the importance of forward-looking feedback.



## Biography

**Lorenzo Sclocco** is an ESL teacher based in Toronto (Canada). He has been teaching English (General, EAP and Business English) at language schools, universities, and colleges since 2009. As a language learner himself, he knows the difficulties that students encounter when learning other languages. Therefore, he

focuses his classes on communication skills and creates his own material. He is a two-time recipient of the Excellence in Teaching Award (2018/2022) at the University of Toronto, School of Continuing Studies.

If I had to choose one word to describe the past two years, I would choose “insightful”. You may be wondering why I would choose such a meaningful word. The past two years have presented many challenges both on personal and professional levels. However, to me, this period provided a springboard for a step I had never thought I would take. I transitioned from teacher to teacher trainer.

When did I come up with the idea of becoming a teacher trainer? I had been attending webinars regularly for the past two years because I wanted to hone my teaching skills in the online environment. I came to realize one fact: I did not have to be proficient in the numerous apps found online, but it was important to remember three words: “pedagogy before technology”. And then it dawned on me: using the skills I had learned, I could train other teachers to become better at teaching. Some of the challenges I addressed were how to differentiate tasks for a mixed-ability class, how to scaffold a lesson for a lower-level student, and what lesson framework (skills-based, text-based, test-teach-test, Task-Based Learning) should be the focus of a lesson.

I have been training teachers since January 2022. While I observe their teaching (each class focuses on a different skill/system), I write down detailed teacher feedback on the lesson. During our follow-up consultation, we discuss what went well (I like to call this “the highlights”) and what we could work on. I also provide suggestions for the upcoming lesson they will be teaching.

## Lorenzo Sclocco

When it comes to teacher training, one aspect that I have found the most insightful is how to give constructive feedback. While it may be easier to make a list of things that were not successful, I believe it is much more challenging to provide practical and ready-to-use suggestions. The next challenge is “how can I give tactful suggestions and not come across as aggressive?” I have started to give forward-looking feedback. For example, instead of saying “You should have done this”, I say “If you were to teach this lesson again, you could...” or “in the future, we could...”. Or, I elicit the answer from the teacher. Instead of saying “Next time that you are giving instructions, make sure to use imperatives or ask CCQs”, I say “What made your instructions confusing to the students? How can we make our instructions better?” The elicitation technique is familiar to many teachers so why not also use it in teacher training? In addition to saying these sentences, or asking these questions orally, I write them in the feedback sheet, so that the teachers are motivated to reflect on their teaching. I also use two bitmojis in my feedback: one bitemoji that says “well done” for the strengths, and another bitemoji that says “you got this” for the action points. Using bitemojis adds a sense of fun to the feedback both for younger and older students.

One word of encouragement I would like to give those teachers who might have been pondering whether or not to become a teacher trainer is the following. If your fellow teachers or colleagues are open to your input, start by providing useful suggestions for their lesson planning or classroom management. A suggestion might be, “You could have the students work on this exercise individually first and then have them compare together, so that they can teach each other, and they will feel more confident” or you can ask a colleague if they would like you to observe their online class (both mic and webcam off) and focus on giving forward-looking feedback, such as “Next time what you could do is...” or “How can we cut down on our teacher talking time?”

Remember: use any opportunity as a springboard to make your job more insightful.

# Building a niche: English with confidence for technical writers

Interview by  
Dr Carol Waites with Chris Morgan  
- entrepreneur, niche builder



## Biography

**Chris Morgan** is an English language teacher and coach with over a decade of experience in the UK, Japan, and now Switzerland. He currently works as an independent language coach offering online programs and content for technical writers and communicators to improve their ease, fluency, and confidence in English. He also teaches part-time for the UN's Centre for Language and Multilingualism in Geneva.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/chris-morgan-3nglish/>

This is a summary of an interview conducted with Chris Morgan, who has transitioned a few times in his life, and is focused on succeeding with his new niche.

He describes himself as a creative guy who was unsure like many of what direction to take his career, and he started life as a town planner in the south of England. He chose this as it fitted his chosen A level subjects and he saw it as a practical, varied and interesting field which would be likely to lead to a career. He enjoyed it for a while but then lost motivation, did a TEFL qualification, and got a job teaching in Japan for 15 months. He then returned to the UK and after a few temporary teaching jobs in Kent, he started teaching English in Cambridge, where he stayed for five years. Unconvinced by the textbook approach, he experimented with Dogme (<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/dogme>) and unplugged teaching (<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/teaching-unplugged>). He also got exhausted teaching six hours a day on low pay and decided to change, going back into planning for a few years before realizing this was really not for him. A combination of marriage and needing a new challenge brought him to Geneva, where he thought he could take up an administrative English-speaking post. However, it proved harder than he had thought, so he started teaching English again. Having taught in a few different settings, he set out to be an entrepreneur and do niche teaching. He has no entrepreneurial background and no one in his family or immediate circle is an entrepreneur, so it is something he has been learning on the run.

His theme is to challenge the traditional ways of teaching and to focus more on confidence building starting from the knowledge the students already have. He has been learning and moving towards a more language coaching approach for a few years now, and I have followed him with interest on LinkedIn where he posts regularly.

However, he was not convinced that he had found the perfect recipe yet, as students were hard to come by. He kept dialogues going on LinkedIn and noticed he was building a small audience, but not enough. He regularly posts videos, particularly when he is on a morning walk in lovely Swiss countryside.

While building his niche, he tries to keep his costs down and uses free versions of Calendly, (<https://calendly.com/>) and Whereby (<https://whereby.com/>). He is currently experimenting with free whiteboards (<https://miro.com/>). He has ups and downs and sometimes feels flat, so then he goes to YouTube and watches inspiring videos. He found ILCA videos with free live events. He found Mark Powell inspirational for graphic design.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4enIW4kNj-c>

He took up a lead of doing James Liu's 21-day challenge (<https://www.facebook.com/jamesliuboweistrategy/>) to help hone his entrepreneurial skills.

Here is the free download of an ebook that James offers online:  
<https://boweistrategy.com/eslteacher-ebook>

James has a business background and helps English teachers develop their niche and charge good rates (100 USD an hour) for their teaching. The revelation he got from James' challenge was how important it is to define your niche with clarity. He soon realized that he had not defined his niche enough and that was likely the reason why so few students had signed up. James' view is that it doesn't matter what niche you choose, just go for one and develop your programme accordingly. So, Chris focused on technical writers and helping build their communicative skills when going to meetings, dealing with clients, and interacting in English in the workplace. He also started experimenting with graphic design on LinkedIn.

We discussed various social media platforms and he often considers trying others. But so far, he has found his place on LinkedIn and is experimenting, learning and building his community there. Later he may test out others. He knows Instagram is popular, Tik Tok and suchlike but each requires different skills.

His graphic skills attracted the attention of Gabriella Kovacs, founding member of the International Language Coaching Association (ILCA).

<https://internationallanguagecoaching.com/>

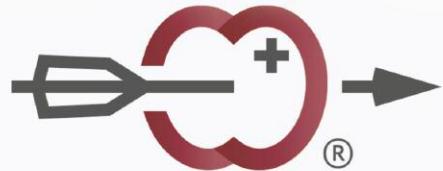
In exchange for coaching and ILCA training course, he did some illustrations for her recently published book <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Comprehensive-Language-Coaching-Handbook-Teaching/dp/180388035X>.

He has written his own short ebook too and would like to develop that further in the future.

James' course also got him thinking about the business aspects of his coaching niche. Chris has been building content for two years now and believes he can recycle it and build on it. Another aspect is to develop his proof of concept and to grapple with a working model. He needs to continue building his community and messaging. He is unsure how many have downloaded his free ebook and needs to do more research on what works. When he has built his model more, he realizes Facebook is good for building communities.

In summary, the 21-day challenge has inspired him to build his niche and to take his business to the next level. Let us keep an eye on Chris on LinkedIn and wish him the best of success.

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# Transitioning to computer-assisted learning in classrooms

Christopher Hunt

## Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns placed technology firmly at the centre of English language teaching and learning for a time. This article explores if, post-lockdown, continued use of computers in lessons presents an opportunity or hindrance.



## Biography

**Christopher Hunt** has over 20 years' EFL teaching experience. He has a Masters in TESOL with Applied Linguistics and his research interests are English as a Global Language and pronunciation instruction.

## Introduction

In 2003, Bax predicted that we would reach a state where computers would be an integral part of language lessons, used in every lesson by language students and teachers like a pen or a book. However, pre-pandemic, i.e. before Covid-19, there seemed to be serious concerns about the role of laptops and devices in classroom-based learning. This ranged from concerns surrounding their effectiveness in learning (Day et al., 2021), to their use for unrelated purposes during lectures (Wammes et al., 2019), to calls for the outright ban of laptops in class (Dynarski, 2017).

While these valid concerns persist, it is clear that Covid-19 has helped mould a new educational order and upgraded educational information technology (Yang & Xin, 2022). For instance, it is believed that applications that became essential for course management and communication during lockdowns such as Moodle will continue playing a vital role in education (Dolenc et al., 2022). Moreover, Gao and Cui (2022) contend that English as a Foreign Language teachers have continued to employ technology-facilitated exercises as a part of their offline teaching.

The return of in-person classes has been accompanied by the presence of laptops and devices in class. On the one hand, this should be welcomed, as evidence suggests a correlation between on-task use of technology in class and increased levels of engagement in the learning process (Butler, 2020). Ragan et al. (2014) found that note taking was the primary use of laptops for university students in lectures. However, by categorizing computer usage in terms of being on-task versus off-task, they discovered that students spent 61% of the time off-task. In any case, should laptops and devices play an essential role in language teaching and learning in a post-lockdown world?

## Potential benefits

As various, exciting technologies emerge, they are usually accompanied by calls for educators to find meaningful ways to



integrate them into classrooms (Klopfer et al., 2009). The underlying assumption in the push to integrate technology into classrooms is the belief that access to computer technology will ultimately lead to enhanced learning results. This can be attributed to its potential to appeal to varying learning styles and approaches (Schmid, 2008).

Ultimately, the successful integration of technology into the classroom will depend on the advantages outweighing the drawbacks to a degree that it becomes indispensable. Presently, computer technology encompasses a myriad of possibilities which are both advantageous to teachers, learners, and institutions. One reason for institutions to aim to realize Bax's (2003) vision is to create paperless classrooms. The term paperless can have a range of meanings but all require re-examining the nature of course content, course presentation, testing, communication, and activities (Shepherd & Reeves, 2012). Computer technology enables information to be displayed in varying sizes, form, and colours, which can add additional information without requiring extra space (Gilliland, 2004). In practical terms, cloud computing provides reliable and secure data storage of students' production in the target language in varying forms for assessment purposes and tracking progress (Zhouxiu et al., 2013).

The field of Computer-Assisted Language Learning, or CALL, concerns "how computer technologies can be introduced and used to help learners to develop their second language ability" (Chapelle, 2008, p. 585). CALL has the potential to provide immediate feedback to students while enabling the teacher to edit and modify materials easily in class (Ellis-Behnke et al., 2003). As a result, teachers may be able to react more effectively to teachable moments by having continued access to student errors and resources to address them. Furthermore, giving effective, personalized feedback to large classes of learners is an almost impossible task which could be aided by CALL (Choi, 2016).

## Challenges

A switch to technologically-centred classrooms presents a series of obstacles. For instance, Kern et al. (2017) cite variances in style, medium and engagement in activities, techno-centrism, and methodology as problematic areas that need to be overcome in the future.

Many of the potential benefits of technology have not been realized yet. Computer and mobile-assisted language learning offer invaluable opportunities for language learners to practise the language; however, the central challenge remains how to enable learners and teachers to benefit from these opportunities (Comas-Quinn, 2011). In the case of CALL, Choi (2016, p.337) concedes that "technology usually fails to successfully analyse the linguistic output of EFL learners, which is fraught with incorrect linguistic phenomena."



In addition, it seems unnecessary for most educators to switch to a reliance on computer-assisted learning at the expense of other, proven methods of teaching. Arguably, the future classroom will need to take advantage of a wide range of resources (Zhouxiu et al., 2013). The challenge for teachers is how best to creatively employ these new resources to reach their lesson objectives. The speed of technological innovation creates a sizeable challenge for institutions, and this is linked to the need to train teachers to employ this technology. For the moment, teachers have legitimate concerns regarding devices being a distraction, providing an opportunity for cheating or causing disruption (Grimshaw et al., 2017).

## Conclusion

Despite the predictions, it is worth examining the likelihood of Bax's vision. Potential hindrances to the normalization of computer technology in classrooms include a lack of funding, insufficient technical support, inadequate training, and large class sizes (Nikolopoulou & Gialamas, 2015). There is also the potential risk of installing a one-size-fits-all approach which ignores learners' points of view, context, individuality, and goals.

Certainly, the quality of computer usage has a greater impact than quantity, and classroom interactions will still form the core of the

classroom of the future. However, these interactions will include not only people, but also technology (Qiu, 2014). Overall, it seems logical to conclude that normalization will occur as it has in so many other aspects of our lives. The fascinating aspect is the impact this will have on our notions of lesson time, a class, a course, and the teaching profession. It is obvious that teacher training courses will need to adapt to these changes to prepare teachers for this future. Garret (2009) contends we are still at an early stage in realizing the potential of CALL to teach our learners, develop materials, and train teachers.

It has also been argued that the successful implementation of technology by a teacher is dependent on their pedagogical beliefs and methodological choices, rather than student access (Schmid, 2008). Moreover, it is worth considering that the nature and the appropriateness of the activity determines successful outcomes and not the technology that is employed (Golonka et al., 2014). As a result, a large burden of responsibility for integrating technology appears to rest for now with the teacher. In the meantime, post-lockdown, teachers have simply continued practising in class whatever they view as pedagogically necessary to facilitate learning (Gao & Cui, 2022).

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# An English teacher identity in transition: Experiences of relocation to Switzerland from Ukraine

## Abstract

This article describes an English teacher identity development which was fostered by relocation to work in Switzerland. It looks into the teaching practices in different cultural and academic environments, and provides recommendations for English teachers planning to work abroad.

## Biography

**Dr Olena Marina** is a guest professor from Ukraine at the University of Teacher Education Lucerne (PHLU), where she is working on her post-doctoral research on the topic: *Identity construction in the dramatic discourse of the English Restoration: A cognitive-pragmatic perspective*. Since 2008 she has been teaching English as a foreign language combined with research work in methods of teaching and linguistics. She has a Master's in Pedagogy and Methodology of Secondary Education: Language and Literature (English, German, World Literature), a Bachelor's in Pedagogical Education: English, German, and World Literature, a PhD in Pedagogy, and is an author of 46 publications in pedagogy, methods of teaching, and linguistics. Her prior research interest lies in identity studies.



Grün = F+E

*Identity* is a rather vague term and this is probably where all scholars attempting to define it agree. Although I do not plan to inundate the readers with the existing definitions and identity research frameworks, still being loyal to my “scientific” identity, I will understand identity as a certain “kind of person” (Gee 2000-2001, p. 99). When describing my English teacher identity relocation experiences, I will follow Schutz, Nichols and Schwenke’s (2018) identity development framework. The scholars argue that critical events in our lives trigger “identity-based reflection and exploration” (Schutz, Nichols & Schwenke, 2018, p. 52), and in connection with this, consider the role of the incoming identity goals, standards, and beliefs; emotional episodes; teacher’s attributions; and identity adjustments. I will conclude this paper with some practical recommendations for teachers who are planning to get English teaching experience abroad.

The crucial event (Schutz, Nichols & Schwenke, 2018) in my case was the beginning of the war in Ukraine, when the support of the Scholars at Risk network and a grant from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) enabled me to relocate to Switzerland and continue my professional activities. The encounter with a different approach to English teachers’ professional training served as a catalyst for my professional identity development.

Dr Olena Marina

Concerning goals, standards, and beliefs, there are major differences between the teaching practices, approaches, and the academic process organization between Ukraine and Switzerland. Transition to a new institution is not a usual practice for a teacher of English in Ukraine and the concept of academic mobility is not so popular. In a country where the distances are huge and it may take up to 48 hours to get to another region, or within a big city, when one way to school or university may take up to two and a half hours, people are very much tied to educational establishments in their local area. While in Switzerland, mobility is a rather popular concept and *Movetia* is a household word.

One more interesting difference in teacher education in Switzerland and Ukraine is that there is differentiation in training between English teachers who will then work with primary or secondary school students, while in Ukraine there is none, and graduates with a master's degree in TESOL can teach English in primary, secondary, or high school.

The differences in curriculum are also substantial, but the main one is that in Ukraine, the subjects in the curriculum for future teachers of English mostly aim at mastering English language skills with the focus on language learning. Among the subjects are, e.g. practice of oral and written English, practical English grammar, and English phonetics, where students expand their vocabulary, master speech patterns, develop their writing and listening skills, revise grammar rules, and explore grammar intricacies in more detail. Methodology subjects are offered later. While in Switzerland, in my view, the curriculum immediately focuses on the English teaching practice and prepares pre-service teachers to work in the field. For example, the first year for future English teachers at PHLU starts with the three major blocks: Introduction to English language teaching, Cultures of the English speaking world, and Task- and content-based language teaching.

One more difference is that universities of teacher training in Ukraine offer a wide range of second language learning options. For example, students enter the foreign languages department at G.S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University having decided on studying English and one more language of their choice: Chinese, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Persian, or Spanish .

In addition, an important difference that in my opinion is rather beneficial in language teaching, is the promotion in Switzerland of the ideas of multiculturalism and plurilingualism. While attending seminars at PHLU, I noticed how students compared similar constructions in English and German, e.g. *there is* and *es gibt*, or grammar tenses like *future simple* in English (*I will...*) and *Futurum* in German (*ich werde...*). Detecting similarities and differences between



### Olena Marina

"A teacher's identity is shaped and reshaped in interaction with others in a professional context." C. Beauchamp & L. Thomas (2009, p. 178).

English and French and other languages from the students' backgrounds are also widely practised and encouraged. While in Ukraine, where the official language is Ukrainian and the students' background is also mostly Ukrainian with rare exceptions, such comparisons occur quite seldom.

Concerning teaching resources, in Switzerland, teachers of English mostly work with a certain set of coursebooks. I see a great advantage in it, as at the universities of teacher education, students immediately learn how to work with the textbooks and during their studies develop their own ideas, and create presentations and learning materials for their future work. In Ukraine, there are recommendations for textbooks that teachers can use in class; however, they can follow their own choice or usual school practices. The absence of a unified recommendation for the choice of textbooks is, on the one hand, beneficial in terms of choice of opportunities, but on the other hand, teachers are basically left on their own with the textbooks, and learn to work with them already in the process of teaching.

According to the framework for identity development analysis that I chose to follow in this article, *emotional episodes* and *internal and external attributions* that always influenced me on the way to my identity transition. According to Schutz, Nichols and Schwenke (2018), not all emotional episodes have the potential to reshape a teacher's identity. However, I believe that in the situation when an English teacher encounters new teaching practices and works with new colleagues in a different environment and builds a new network of colleagues, it is a combination of all these emotional episodes that becomes crucial for identity change and development.

Approachability and high efficiency of the management at PHLU, openness and engagement of colleagues, participation in international conferences like "Semaine internationale de l'éducation et de la formation" (SIEF), where the exchange of ideas with international colleagues gives much more than food for thought, definitely fostered my identity development by making me a more versatile and open teacher (here I already started speaking about *identity adjustments*). While in Ukraine, emotional episodes that influenced my English teacher identity were outstanding achievements of my students, e.g., my student Anna Chumak winning a scholarship to study for the Master of Arts in TESOL at the Central Michigan University, USA, and conference participations.

To continue with *identity adjustments*, major differences in curricula and approaches, as well as social exchanges made me recapitulate my teaching goals and beliefs, attitudes, and role models. I had a chance to see multiculturalism and plurilingualism at work and their benefits, and would definitely advocate them in the future. All in all, the analysis of the identity development framework and my relocation experiences resulted in certain conclusions and tips for teachers of English planning to work in other countries.

### Tips for English teachers planning to work abroad

*Stay optimistic!* Working in a foreign country can be challenging in terms of language, culture, mentality, and everyday "difficulties" like figuring out ways of transportation and paperwork. However, reflecting upon these afterwards will definitely make you smile. Try to focus on the positive things around and the picture will not be entirely bleak anymore!

*Communicate, explore, and share!* Talk to teachers, assistants, and management. Each and every person carries a piece of a bigger puzzle. Assembling one takes time and effort, but the picture will always amaze you! I am very much convinced that teachers love to show their best achievements. Teaching English abroad is also a great opportunity to reflect on your own teaching experiences, to recapitulate, and enrich them. Start sharing your experiences, do not wait to be asked! Firstly, it is a good way to start a discussion, and secondly, openness always works beneficially: people just open up in response!

*Identify!* Every educational establishment has its history and traditions. Becoming a part of it may seem difficult at the start. No matter in what part of the globe we are, there is one thing that unites us all – love for English and teaching. I enjoy drinking water from the glasses with the PHLU logo and wearing green, which is the colour of my department: Research and Development. Feeling a part of a bigger community makes one happier. My conclusion is not new, and was made by Argyle and Henderson back in 1985.

All in all, teaching English abroad will have an influence on your teacher identity, but you can only learn what it will be like by doing it.

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# Inside(r) looking out

Dr Lesley June Fearn

## Abstract

Practitioner-researchers are considered pioneers of change inside and outside of their workplace. But how do teachers change when studying their practice? This essay examines the transition through the author's three-year Doctorate in Education while working full-time in southern Italy as a secondary school EFL teacher.



## Biography

**Dr Lesley June Fearn** is an affiliate researcher with the Open University (UK), where she achieved her Doctorate in Education (EdD). Her background is in Fine Art and English Literature, but her research interests lie in the field of English as a Foreign Language and Education Technology. These interests stem from having worked as a secondary school

English teacher in southern Italy for three decades, the last of which has been dedicated to experimenting with Information and Communications Technology to motivate her students. Today, her interests lay in what she calls *online community projects*, which are becoming increasingly popular in secondary schools worldwide. She uses analytic autoethnography and action research methodology to examine how far they can support the learning and teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in secondary school settings.

## Introduction

Nowadays, *practitioner research*, otherwise known as *insider research*, is becoming ever more common in educational settings, and many professionals are taking on professional doctorates. The Doctorate of Education (EdD) is the most popular among teachers (Burnard et al., 2018). There are numerous reasons why practising teachers might take on such significant tasks. Some want to advance their professional development with an academic title, while others want to learn more about an issue they have encountered in their practice. But whatever the reason, the transition to becoming a practitioner-researcher is neither rapid nor modest and often involves a considerable financial cost. This essay examines the transition from teacher to practitioner-researcher, reporting on the researcher's experience doing an EdD as a secondary school EFL teacher. Findings are supported by literature from other insider researchers and their experiences investigating their workplace.

## Background

### Inside research

Firstly, it is essential to define insider research and the professional doctorate, which in my case was the EdD. Universities offering practitioner doctorates such as the EdD are generally located in Australia, the EU, North America, and the UK. Unlike PhD students, practitioner-researchers are usually aged between 30 and 60 and established in careers in education, health, and business (Barnacle, 2012). Insider research investigates phenomena that occur naturally in the workplace from an inside perspective to improve practice and share outcomes (Helps, 2017). There are various research methodologies for inside research, but my EdD study used *action research*. Action research is flexible and reflective and, therefore, beneficial for teachers who want to advance their understanding of their practice (Leggett & Newman, 2018). Furthermore, when knowledge is produced, so too is "a new kind of self: that of scholar or researcher" (Barnacle, 2012, p. 82).

However, research done by practitioners has been the cause of controversy and is not always trusted by traditional academics researching as outsiders (Fox et al., 2022). They believe that insider research is more likely biased and unethical because data can be influenced and damaged by unequal power relations between teacher-researchers and their students or colleagues (Thomson & Gunter, 2011). Nevertheless, a practitioner's familiarity with their work settings provides insight into areas of potential study that outsiders could not have (Costley et al., 2010). Additionally, the teaching profession is naturally reflective (Burnard et al., 2018). Teachers have to link idealistic curriculum obligations with the reality of the context (Burns, 1999). Furthermore, teachers understand their workplace's social, cultural, and historical contexts (Johnson, 2006), while outside research often produces an impractical theory of little use in the classroom (Kumaravadivelu & Erlbaum, 2006).

## Methodology

This essay uses an analytic autoethnographical methodology, which is a valuable tool for insider research because of its reflexive disposition and the researcher's high visibility (Anderson, 2006). It is organized into four sections: proposal, transition, difficulties, and sharing. Each uses the researcher's feelings and experiences as data and is analysed using literature in the same research field.

## Proposal

There are various reasons why a teacher might want to take on an EdD. It might be for personal achievement, improving practice, or advancing a career (Burnard et al., 2018). My purpose was prompted by loss.

"My decision to take on an EdD dated back to the death of my parents, who died after long, painful illnesses. I wanted to do something meaningful and special with the extra time I had in memory of them. I decided upon a course in Educational Enquiry, and the EdD progressed from there. The more I learned, the more I wanted to know." (Author).

Insider research usually stems from a *problem* rooted in practice rather than a *question* from literature, as with academic research done by researchers external to the study settings (Burnard et al., 2018).

"I had been using online community projects (OCPs) for years and knew my students enjoyed using them. Still, I was not sure how useful they were in learning EFL. My study showed that OCPs were useful in teaching and learning EFL in many ways, but it took me over three arduous years to reach that conclusion." (Author).

Research is time-consuming, and full-time teachers are busy (Leggett & Newman, 2018; Palloff & Pratt, 1999).

## Transition

The transition from teacher to researcher involves a transformation in practice and produces social change.

"Becoming a practitioner-researcher has changed me in many ways. I am a different person, both professionally and personally. Firstly, I feel more confident as a person and teacher because I am more articulate. Secondly, my practice has improved and continues to do so as I experiment with new ideas and continue reading and researching in the field of education. Thirdly, my experience as a researcher has helped me understand my students better and improved my relationships with them, despite our age differences." (Author).

As Hanks (2018) predicted, reflexive research became part of my practice and identity. The study helped me to recognize my students' identities. I also learned the importance of being reflexive and impartial to behave more carefully when teaching (Santamaría & Ade-Ojo, 2019). These facts suggest that insider research can lead to functional changes. It provides practitioners with a voice and leads to improvement by helping outsiders to understand particular contexts and settings (Townsend, 2012).

## Difficulties

However, change is intimidating, and outcomes can be uncomfortable and challenging to control or predict (Burnard et al., 2018). Research can be complex for older teachers, and the lack of support in the workplace can make them feel demotivated (Padwad, 2018). My experience was complicated further by natural disasters and a sustained lack of experience in academic writing.

"The three years of my EdD were interrupted by a devastating earthquake and a global pandemic. Additionally, as human beings, our personal lives are never without distractions. Another unexpected difficulty I had was with academic writing. It is a whole new language with its own rules and vocabulary. Furthermore, being in my late 50s meant my mind was not as flexible, nor my memory as strong as younger academics. However, I had been actively teaching EFL for more than 30 years, and my rich experience was the foundation for my study and thesis." (Author).

Despite the numerous setbacks practitioner-researchers might face, they are sustained by the advantage of experience and knowing where to look for answers (Anderson, 2006; Costley et al., 2010). Additionally, achieving an EdD requires considerable sacrifice.

"I funded my EdD myself. It took much longer than I expected. I was told to expect to need about 18 hours per week, but I spent much more than that. Plus, I still had my full-time job, so I had to sacrifice considerable time that would otherwise have been spent with my family." (Author).

Burns (2018) suggests that teachers should be provided with  
1) paid time to research,  
2) the resources they need, and  
3) opportunities to share their results with interested colleagues.  
I received none of those things.

## Sharing

Insider research should only ever be directed at the practice of those involved in the study because others might have contrasting viewpoints or be opposed to change (Fox et al., 2022).

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- "I asked my headteacher for permission to do the research and told my colleagues. My headteacher was encouraging and published my intentions in the school *// piano triennale dell'offerta formative* (PTOF), a public document describing the school's three-year development plan (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2017). My colleagues were wonderful and helped as participants in my study. I explained it to them, gave them information leaflets, and asked them to sign consent forms, so they knew what my research entailed. I also sent them the link to my thesis when it was finished and published." (Author).
- Insider research appears uncommon in Italian state schools. An examination of literature only revealed descriptions in reference books, such as Barbier (2007). This fact does not mean insider research is not being done in Italian state schools, but I could not find any publications. Insider research does not need to be academic or published and can be shared in various ways (Hanks, 2018). Still, education systems and management should encourage teachers to take on research by treating them as professionals, not just technicians, because student outcomes will benefit (Burns, 2018).
- ## Conclusion
- In conclusion, this essay provides a brief autoethnographical account of the author's transition from being a teacher to practitioner-researcher through accomplishing an EdD. Transformations were all positive and perceived both on a professional level and a personal one. Time spent doing something I felt to be meaningful led to an enriched feeling of confidence, both inside and outside of the practice. Skills were perceived to have improved in communication, teaching, and academic writing. Finally, relationships with students were felt to have been enriched by a better understanding of pedagogical theory in EFL.
- However, the transition came at a cost financially and in the enormous amount of time spent. It is arguable whether the advantages listed were worth the price paid, considering most of them benefited the practice. Therefore, this essay suggests that school systems should invest in the quality of their staff by providing them with the time and financial encouragement they need to research and improve their practices, particularly in Italy. Finally, it is to be noted that this essay is a description of the researcher's experience and does not claim to generalise in any way at all or suggest that other teachers will have the same experience or reach the same conclusions.

# Successful English teaching and learning with older learners

Dr Briony Beaven

## Biography



Dr Briony Beaven is a language teaching consultant, teacher trainer, and materials writer. She taught English in a British secondary state school (PGCE and QTS) for several years before moving into teaching EFL, later becoming the DoS in a large adult education institute. As a NILE Affiliate Teacher Trainer, she has worked with teachers in many countries around the world, and supervised students on the NILE MA course. Briony is a Cambridge Teaching Awards Delta tutor, assessor, and moderator. She has served as the Coordinator of the Teacher Trainers' and Educators' Special Interest Group of IATEFL and was Editor of IATEFL Conference Selections for five years. She has presented at many international conferences and has written coursebooks for Oxford University Press and for Cornelsen Verlag, materials for teacher training and trainer training courses, and articles in professional journals. Her ELT qualifications include the UCLES Dip. TEFL and a Doctorate of Education in TEFL. [brionybeaven1@t-online.de](mailto:brionybeaven1@t-online.de)

## Abstract

The concept of lifelong learning is one of the factors that has led to older "learners" becoming a buzzword in English language teaching. Learning a language can keep seniors socially connected and improve their self-confidence. However, teaching this age group presents us with challenges. Cognitive and physiological changes as well as different attitudes to learning, different behavioural patterns, and issues of motivation require language teachers to develop new skills to succeed with seniors. In this article I will investigate relevant ageing processes and explore some appropriate teacher strategies for maximizing senior learning.

This article is based on a workshop given at the ETAS Professional Development Day in September 2019. The topic of teaching older adults may interest a wider audience since older learners are a numerically significant group, and it is not unusual for teachers to transition to working with them. Teaching retirees can be very rewarding but is likely to be more successful if we remember that, like most age groups, they have both common and individual characteristics and needs.

We find older learners in two types of class. Firstly, there are general classes with older participants among the learners, and secondly there are classes designated as for older learners, seniors, or some such term. Perhaps older learners who join general classes have less sense of themselves as belonging to a particular age cohort, or indeed, consciously do not wish to be constrained by their age. These learners are mixed in with younger, possibly faster, more flexible learners, which affects the pace and mood of the class. Special classes for older learners, on the other hand, contain participants who have self-selected to be in a class with that name and know others will be of the same age group. Knowing that some older learners prefer to be in a multi-age class, and not labelled as older, while others prefer to learn with those of similar age might provide teachers with useful starting points about likely differences in the personalities, histories, and learning preferences of older course members.



I will consider four potential areas of interest in this article. I will begin by presenting some widely accepted theories concerning older adult learning, including motivation, and then go on to look at possible challenges for learners and teachers as well as possible mitigation strategies. Next, I will consider how we can maximize the positive points of our target learners and lastly how we can reduce their anxiety and increase their confidence.

## Older adult learning The brain

Older learners are sometimes dismissed as slow and inflexible but Tosato, Zamboni, Ferrini, and Cesari (2007) remind us that "It is crucial to underline that ageing is not a disease. In the last decades, ageing has received a negative connotation and become synonymous with deterioration, approaching pathology, and death" (p. 402). Far from necessarily being dull-witted, older learners have a highly developed cognitive system and an often high crystallized intelligence level: knowledge from prior learning and past experiences (Brown, 2016). Furthermore, they are likely to be self-directed, results-oriented, purposeful, and with some training in strategies, fairly autonomous.

On the deficit side, many older adults have a slower reaction speed and process information more slowly than younger people. Attention spans may be shorter and they may experience changes in the ability to retain and retrieve new knowledge. Fluid intelligence - being able to think and reason abstractly, and solve problems (*ibid.*) - will normally be lower than in young people, but as it is generally thought to peak before or around the age of forty, unless you teach only very young adults, reduced fluid intelligence is a factor in adult learning generally.

## The body

Ageing brings with it the possibility of learning being adversely impacted by physical problems, though many elders will escape poor health unless or until they live to a very advanced age. Chronic illnesses and accidents with longer recovery time may lead to missed lessons. Disturbed sleep, as we will all know, and quite common in the elderly, temporarily reduces concentration and ability to process input. Decreased mobility and slower motor responses, or limitations in hearing and sight, will require the teacher to respond flexibly, adapting the classroom and its activities according to any physical difficulties that participants may have.

## C. Social factors

There is, of course, huge variety amongst individuals and context but it is worth remembering that many of our target group live alone, particularly women, that some will feel a loss of status and identity through having given up their jobs and become "pensioners" (Health Online Unit, Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2022), that there are differences between the so-called third age (60–80) and fourth age (80+), and that many need social links and recognition, as well as the "involvement in the world" that participation in a class brings with it.

## D. Emotional factors

Our learners may be oppressed by a societal view of older people as unimportant, incapable of learning, or out of touch, which can lead to lack of self-esteem. A fear of failure, e.g. of making mistakes, or of

loss of face, allied to a general anxiety about new situations, is quite common in this age group. Language learning is often viewed as risky owing to the “self-exposure”.

## Motivation

Motivation is a key factor in language learning. Let us look at what we mean when we say that learners need to be motivated. It is a complicated concept as it covers a wide range of reasons for doing something. For example, if a woman is walking along the street and then turns away and enters a cafe, it could be for any of the following reasons:

- She knows some of her friends often go there and she might meet them and have a nice chat;
- She is thirsty;
- She is hungry;
- She has spotted a man or woman she likes in the café and wants to join them;
- She is tired and needs a sit-down;
- She needs to find a toilet and there are no public facilities in the neighbourhood;
- It has started to rain and she has no umbrella or coat;
- She has arranged to meet someone in the café;
- She has her laptop with her and finds the café a congenial place to work;
- She remembers seeing something about this café on her social media and as co-incidence has brought her so near she wants to go in and check it out.

Language learners' motivation is just as varied, though if we look at the diagram in Figure 1, it is clear that while learners in general may fit either profile, most of our older learners match the one on the left. This intrinsic motivation – learning for its own sake – is a good basis for starting a course but we have to remember that motivation is not only about beginning an activity but also about continuation. Williams (1997) observes that, “Motivation may be construed as a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, which leads to a conscious decision to act, and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort ....” (p. 120). It is up to us, the teachers, to help our learners sustain their motivation by paying good attention to appropriate levels of challenge and support. Too much challenge combined with too little support, and we reinforce anxiety, while too little challenge and a stifling level of proffered support leads to boredom.

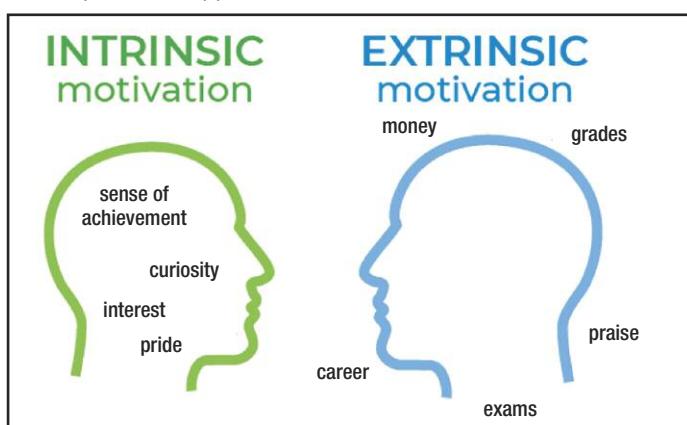


Figure 1 Two kinds of motivation  
(From Heusser, 2018)

In addition, we will need to focus on the “special needs” of our target group, and these will be discussed in the following section.

## Challenges for teachers and learners with some mitigation strategies

In this section, I consider specific physical problems that will affect some learners. If not addressed, they are likely to adversely impact not only the sufferer's learning, but also that of other learners in the class, owing to the distractions caused by extra demands on the teacher's attention or by learners interrupting the flow of the lesson with expressed frustrations and dissatisfactions.

### Challenge 1 Hearing loss

Firstly, ensure that you speak clearly and that students can see your face and lips. It is advisable, of course, to prepare all learners for topic and task in listening skills work but is especially important with older learners. You may need to play the audio more loudly than you would with other classes and to find ways of reducing background noise. Learners enjoy repeating listening activities if they had difficulty the first time round since this leads to a better task success rate. For years it was considered pedagogically unsound to focus on audio scripts in class, but there is a lot of mileage in using follow-up tasks with activities using the audio script, e.g. underlining reference words, or underlining examples of a type of phrase designated by the teacher.

### Challenge 2 Sight impairment

Use data projector slides, or Smartboard, not handwriting on the board, whenever possible. Choose a clear, simple font and make good use of bold type, and 24-36-point print type for projected visuals. Avoid overuse of upper case, as would actually be advisable for all classes, in order to demonstrate the use of upper and lower case in English. Bright but sharp colours work best for those with poor sight. White or pale backgrounds are helpful, and black lettering works well, too, but white letters should be avoided. When preparing handouts, use 14-point fonts instead of the usual 10 or 12.

### Challenge 3 Mobility

If furniture can be moved, arrange it for easy access. Forming new pairs and groups may require some learners to remain in their seats, while others who can do so move around, but allow plenty of time for them to move.

## Using the positives: Three principles

1 Make use of the learners’ “time rich” stage of life. With these learners, you can set homework and it is likely to be done, providing you do not set it when learners are already packing up to leave (because they need time to note down what they have to do), and providing you always make time the following lesson for feedback on the homework.

2 Appreciate and build on learners’ extensive knowledge of the world over a lifetime by connecting classroom activities to learners’ previous experiences. An activity such as matching events from the previous say, 80 years, to dates – in groups – followed by discussion of memories, rekindles memories and values life experience, and the experience of success leads to increased confidence in using English.

3 Help the learners relate to modern life, e.g. introduce a current hit song and make use of any well-known song activities, such as gap-fills with or without text supplied, jumbled lines, guessing the “message” of the final verse, or discussing the effect the song has on you. Or, since many older learners have smartphones these days, but are not always fully confident in using them, teach some lexis relating to phone apps and social media and discuss:

Which of the words did you know?  
Do you use any of these apps or websites? Why? Why not?  
Would you like to use any of them that you don't yet use?  
Where would you find out how to use the app?

## Reducing anxiety and increasing confidence

Begley (2010), writing about the science of ageing brains, notes that, “For the brain, ageing may become almost optional” (para. 18). However, myths about the difficulty or even impossibility of learning anything new at an advanced age still abound, and can negatively affect older people’s image of themselves as learners. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers create a supportive, collaborative atmosphere, and provide experiences of success in language learning. We can support learners in achieving that success through the following measures: firstly, by giving them time to rehearse before reading aloud, writing or speaking. Then, we can include lots of repetition, recycling, and drills, long scorned as outdated but now rehabilitated to some extent. Whatever your general position on drilling, it is uncontroversially good for confidence-raising. If you have little experience with drills, you would probably benefit from consulting a reputable online source such as ELT Concourse (n.d.) for types of drill and teaching techniques. Thirdly, help your class to get more “bang for their bucks” in their English learning by teaching them strategies for areas such as:

- How to record and learn vocabulary;
- How to make best use of the coursebook;
- How often and for how long to learn English outside class;
- How to make best use of the teacher and other learners.

Next, remember to mark the stages of the lesson clearly; this is good practice for all classes, of course, but extra important for this age cohort that tends to like a structured, organized approach (Bosisio, 2019). It is the difference between:

"Right, let me see, well, grammar, OK, let's open our books now, on p. 33." (No summing up of what students have just done.

No indication of why they might be using p. 33 now.)

... And

"So, we've just revised 'used to' and now you know how to use that to talk about the past. Next, we're going to look at fashions in the past and present – 1960 up to now!" (Teacher verbally marks what has been done, and that the stage is finished. Makes it clear that they are moving on to a new lesson stage.)

Do not forget to use lots of images and visuals to supplement oral information or instructions and keep to a simple lesson paradigm or shape. An easy start and an interesting finish are likely to keep learners coming back for the next lesson, especially if you bury the hard bits in the middle!



## Concluding caveat

Inevitably, and I hope usefully, this article has pointed the reader towards possible limitations amongst the target group that the teacher should be aware of. However, nowadays there are many older learners whose learning needs and behavioural traits are little different from those of learners decades younger. We might want to remember that some of our most sought-out ETAS and IATEFL speakers and authors are technically "senior citizens" but working in a way and at a level that makes them highly valued in our professional community. You may well have such a person – but from a different language and professional background - walking in through the doors of your classroom for Lesson 1!

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# RESOURCES



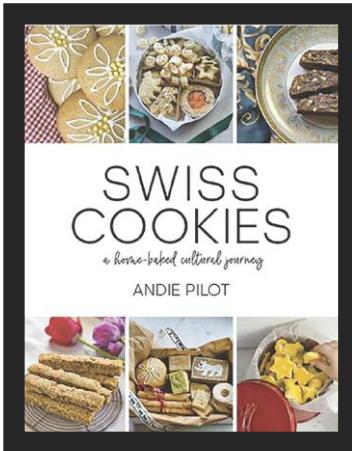
## Hannah McCulloch

**Hannah McCulloch**  
is the Resources Editor  
and Publications Chair.

She welcomes any  
suggestions and  
submissions for  
the section.

The last time I properly read a book from cover to cover was on holiday in February – a novel I found on Kindle set in the country I was visiting. I feel quite embarrassed by this fact as I look longingly at all the inviting titles on my bookshelf and think back to how much I had read by this time last year. Rather than feel disheartened and defeated for too long, I try to reflect on why this has happened, accept that it is OK to go through these phases, and devise a way to overcome this slump. Concentration wanes during busy times, and, not one for sitting still too long nor having the time to, I prefer podcasts, music, or the radio to accompany me to, from, or after work. Switching to audiobook has helped, especially those read by the author (I can highly recommend anything by Louis Theroux for his soothing voice!). Re-reading old favourites and opting for short stories do help, too. I also reframe the term “reading”, which does not have to consist of devouring entire novels, then you realize how much you actually do manage throughout the day – *20 Minuten* in the mornings, a blog post, an interview, reading for a course, a poem, one or two articles from ETAS Journal, or even just a chapter of a book all counts. In a world filled with lists such as “1000 books to read before you die” and friends adding yet another completed book to their Goodreads Reading Challenge, I am all for championing the “less is more” approach and going at your own pace. Little by little, you will soon find yourself returning to your former reader self, or maybe becoming a completely different one. Ulysses, anyone?!

A huge thank you to everyone who has written a review and to all our publishers for their generosity in providing sample copies year after year. Wishing you all a restorative winter break and I look forward to receiving more reviews in the new year!



## Swiss Cookies: A Home-Baked Cultural Journey

Andie Pilot

Bergli Books (2021)  
ISBN 9783038691129  
144 pages, hardback

Andie Pilot, a Swiss-Canadian chef and author of several books on food and drink, is lucky enough to live in Trubschachen, not only a lovely part of the country but also near the Kambly cookie factory. Despite the temptations of a large cookie shop almost next door, she has carried on her family's tradition of baking her own goodies with old and new recipes partly gleaned from her travels to Swiss cookie producers.

High-quality ingredients, hard work, and patience lie behind cookie baking, so Andie begins with the basic skills, ingredients, and equipment needed to get you started. The first recipes feature the rather daunting specimens created by the major Swiss biscuit producers such as "Leckerlis" and "Bretzelis" in Basel and Zürich, but of these the Bernese Lebkuchen are perhaps the easiest to start with (just in time for Samichlaus on 6 December). There are even tips on how to eat a Willisauer Ringli (aka tooth-breakers). In fact, several Swiss cookies are rather hard, in my view, for example Totenbeinli (™dead legs) and Geduldzeltli (the name implying you need patience not only to make them but also to eat them). Fortunately, although these confections have their aficionados, most of the recipes are fairly easy to make and eat, once you have mastered the basic cookie dough, or Guetzliteig, which can be adapted to suit, using different cookie cutters and adding ingredients such as cocoa powder: fairly fool-proof and versatile and suitable for baking with children. Andie also takes traditional recipes and adds more unusual ingredients such as Ovomaltine ™ or Absinthe (now we're talking!).

Of course, no book on Swiss baking would be complete without the top four, which just happen to be my favourite Christmas cookies: Brünsli, Mailänderli, Spitzbuben, and Zimtstern. Why anyone would want to eat Chräbeli and risk breaking their teeth has always been a mystery to me but if you must, there is a recipe to make your own included. And for perfectionists, there is even a recipe on how to make your own marzipan.

There are sections on trouble-shooting, further reading, sourcing ingredients and tools, and a useful index. Apart from the accessible recipes with mouth-watering photographs, Andie's book is full of background information and anecdotes, historical references, and inspiring ideas for trips to the cookie factories in beautiful parts of Switzerland. So, here's your Christmas sorted: you make some cookies and give them as presents, and if you are feeling particularly generous, you give the book too!

In the classroom, getting students acquainted with the vocabulary associated with cooking and baking and encouraging them to bring in their own recipes is a popular seasonal diversion, which is also educational.

**Helena Lustenberger**



## Listening Resource: In Our Time podcast on BBC Radio 4

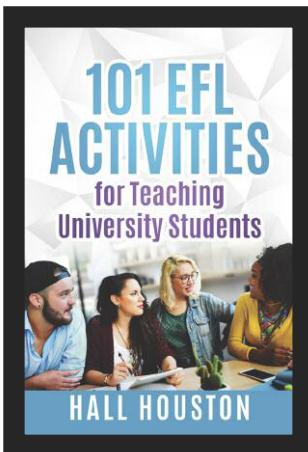
One of the most underestimated skills by students and teachers alike is listening. The older one gets, the more one realizes that listening is vital to language learning. Small children listen for about a year before they produce words. One of the most versatile and useful sources of listening is, of course, the radio and my favourite programme is *In Our Time*, which is a treasure trove of discussions on the topics of culture, philosophy, religion, history and science. A staggering 963 podcasts are available, so you are spoilt for choice.

Every week, Melvyn Bragg, a British journalist and national treasure, who is always unbelievably well-prepared, interviews three experts on the chosen topic. He asks simple questions and, although the experts give expert answers as you might expect, there is nothing elitist or inaccessible about the programmes. They are entertaining and humorous, and nothing seems taboo. Listeners are occasionally given the opportunity to suggest topics, but with 963 episodes and counting already available, there is something for everyone. Anytime you can listen whenever and wherever you want.

These programmes are excellent resources for teachers for first-hand background information; inspiration for both teachers and students alike to explore certain themes further (and the website provides reading lists after each programme): resources for immersion classes, listening practice for advanced students, and finally, a chance for everyone to increase their general knowledge.

One of my favourite sections of the website is called "Features", which is a spin-off of the programmes, with humorous and tempting titles such as "How not to be a Victorian woman", "How to survive the afterlife like an ancient Egyptian", "When the Gin Craze swept Britain" (the first time), and "Could you be a muse?" Intrigued? Start listening now!

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qykl>



## 101 EFL Activities for Teaching University Students

Hall Houston

Independently published on iDTi TESOL (2022)

ISBN: 9798419082793

152 pages, paperback and Kindle edition

Hall Houston is the author of several books on language teaching, but his most recent, *101 Activities for Teaching University Students*, is clearly aimed at teachers of EFL at university and based on his experience teaching undergraduates at the National Taipei University of Nursing and Health Sciences. Nevertheless, he stresses the book's suitability in other teaching situations such as high schools and language schools and for subjects other than EFL.

The introduction describes how three themes theoretically underpin the 101 activities and shows the author's clear rationale for each theme alongside support from the literature:

- 1) "The context of the university environment": discussing how students react to their new physical and intellectual environments.
- 2) "Group dynamics - the stages of a group": examining how groups form, transition, perform, and dissolve over a semester.
- 3) "Active learning": suggesting how students can be more involved in, and engaged by, the learning process.

A brief but enlightening section tells us "What is unique about university students" and is followed by an overview of the book. Three chapters constitute the book and each deals with a specific part of a semester: "Getting off to a good start", "Maintaining motivation and interest in the interim weeks" and "Ending the semester gracefully".

Each chapter has its own introduction and is divided into sections providing activities pertinent to aspects of that part of the semester. While practising all four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking in a variety of motivating ways, use is made of music, video, and students' mobile phones along with paper, pens, and sticky notes. This may be university teaching, but it is very much practical and memorable language learning.

"Teacher development tips" containing practical advice and encouragement to both the novice and the more experienced teacher round off each chapter. I was inspired by the idea of writing down one's predictions for the coming semester at the start, sealing them until the end, before reviewing them in the light of what has transpired. Such a tip has the potential to be a powerful developmental tool for a teacher at any stage of their career.

An annotated section of the author's "Recommended books and web resources..." is included along with links to two online courses dealing with group dynamics and active learning for adults (this one is free). Learning what a fellow practitioner considers useful and insightful about resources is most helpful when we are overwhelmed by recommendations. The bibliography contains sources familiar from initial teacher training as well as ones more pertinent to the university context and specific aspects of university teaching, for example EAP.

The activities are all practical and emphasize active participation and much student-to-student interaction. While a few are purposely teacher-focused, the vast majority are student-centred and firmly reflect communicative approaches. Many require minimal or no preparation and for each activity the timings, skills practiced, preparation, and procedure are provided. Where appropriate extensions, variations, or options are offered increasing the scope of many activities. Apart from a reader-friendly layout, and if reading online, an easily navigated contents page, a downloadable pdf accompanies some activities and, on occasion, a link to a relevant website.

Given the above strengths, I nevertheless have to mention three areas which should have been addressed:

- 1) given recent events, there is strangely no mention of online teaching and so I was asking myself throughout: "Would this or that activity work online?" I'm happy to report that in most cases I think they would!
- 2) large classes are assumed, which is not always the case, and so adaptation may be required for other scenarios, and no mention is made of language level as if this is the same for all participants, which it rarely is.
- 3) neat beginnings, middles, and ends are also assumed, whereas for various reasons a new teacher or student can appear at any point and affect the established routines and group dynamics.

Reviewing *101 Activities...* was a journey into the past and the future, frequently reminding me of the times I had done similar or, unnervingly, the same activities, while also contemplating how, when, and with which learners I could try out, or adapt other activities. After many years in the classroom, this is an occupational hazard.

Overall, this is an ideal resource for those engaged in teaching at college or university and while genuinely offering 101 activities to anyone who is new to this area, there is sufficient material for old hands to up their game and try something new.

**Gordon Dobson** teaches groups and individuals, online and face-to-face, in Zürich and Basel

# 2022 ETAS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAY





# AFTER

Geoff Tranter

## The effects of the global financial and political crisis on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

The Council of Europe is reported to be extremely concerned about the global financial crisis that its forty-six member states are facing at the present time. This particularly applies in the context of the CEFR and its six proficiency levels A1 – A2 – B1 – B2 – C1 and C2 in connection with the worldwide steep rise in inflation. In fact, US rating agencies such as “Poor standards”, “Futch” and “Bad moodys” are allegedly already planning possible steps to downgrade all CEFR competence levels. According to yet unconfirmed sources, several language learners with B1 certificates could lose their status as Independent Users with B1 possibly being downgraded to around B 0.9. And C2 certificate holders could be at risk of suffering an even greater “haircut”, potentially ending up at around C1.53! There is even a rumour that native speakers might be downgraded to “naïve speakers”.

One direct cause of this development is the effect of so-called bad banks (data banks and item banks) and several toxic, inadequately validated, and unreliable test items. This may not affect all languages, so a leading European examination board is said to be preparing a report on the situation across Europe. Here are some of its findings.

a) Rome: The Italian B1 has enjoyed considerable support since the days of ex-Prime Minister Berlusconi, who allegedly declared his full backing for all Italian CEFR levels. For this reason, Silvio is said to have taken one B1 test every night to help preserve his performance level. However, there have always been two pre-conditions on his part: firstly, the test must be a paired-format test, and secondly his fellow-candidate must be a Young Learner. Informed sources claim that Berlusconi Italian tests have since been known as RU-BY 1, RU-BY 2, etc. His support apparently also includes the offer of one of his luxury villas as a central examination centre to be known as the CEFR Bunga-Bungalow.

There could, however, very soon be changes to the CEFR system in Italy as the new political bloc threatening to gain an absolute majority in the forthcoming elections will probably only agree to keep the European system of CEFR-based language examinations if, in the case of multiple-choice items, all the possible answers are on the right, and the correct answer is on the extreme right; all other options further to the left will be considered distractors.

b) Athens: The good news here is that the value of the Greek CEFR levels which plummeted around ten years ago, when B1 was rated as only really worth B 0.45, mainly due to a dictation exercise forced upon them by strict language regimes in the North of Europe, has now recovered. The tests have now achieved Beta level, a Microsoft quality standard well-known to all computer users.

c) Paris: The French B1 tests are equally exposed, as historically the French test system has a great affinity with Greek traditions; even to the extent that many of their French language tests are organized under the name of DELPH/DALPH. Traditionally, the French have always had a faiblesse for technical innovations including computer-based testing. However, this has been reducing in popularity over the last few years due unfortunately to the increasing desire of many French people to change to a system based on le Pen, perhaps because many of the French CEFR level tests are (B) un-deux-developped in terms of numbers of candidates.

d) Madrid: According to unofficial reports, the present inflation rate could see all Spanish B2 level examinations in great danger of being downgraded to *B Juan*. This will result in a huge increase in (candi)debts and an equally large fall in the rate of interest in non and extra-European CEFR-based qualifications.

e) Istanbul: For some time, it has become increasingly obvious that the productive skills of speaking and writing are rapidly becoming less and less appreciated in the Turkish language context, whereas Listening and Reading (i.e., the so-called **RECEP**-tive skills) are being actively promoted. As a result, productive skills may locally be capped at A2 (elementary, non-independent users), whereas **RECEP**-tive skills will be promoted across the nation, although the range of texts and text sources could be subject to restrictions.

f) London: Government circles are privately quite satisfied with recent developments regarding the decrease in European influence resulting from a

# CLASS

possible downgrading of the CEFR, reflecting Shakespeare's personal sceptical approach towards the CEFR ("B2 or not B2, that is the question!"). What is more, many UK language experts have always believed the good old British system of Elementary – Intermediate – Advanced to be far superior, even though the various names at intermediate level: lower intermediate, pre-intermediate, post-intermediate, upper intermediate, higher intermediate, etc., etc. still cause problems for the uninitiated non-Brit.

For the Council of Europe, the recent change of government in the UK presents a further problem insofar as the now anti-EU, pro-BREXIT Prime Minister of the present anti-European government is already sowing misstruss (*nomen est omen*), for example with her views on definite articles (cf. Article 16).

- g) Berlin: Due to the high level of expertise and the German reputation for reliability, the German B1 has revealed a high level of stability during the past difficult months. This particularly applies to the German tests for immigrants (DAZ), or as many German civil servants say: "DAZ vot ve vont!".

As a result of the strong position of the hard German B1, increasing pressure is being brought to bear on official agencies in Germany to upgrade the B1 level to B 1.1 or even B 1.2 in order to stabilize the weaker European B1s.

The second reason for the risk of high inflation and CEFR proficiency level depreciation is the intervention of a new examination **RUSSIAN FOR OCCUPATION PURPOSES**.

This unexpected addition to the European portfolio of language tests for (very) specific purposes is not completely new. After a short period of pre-testing and standard setting in Crimea (remarkably the name *Crimea* is an anagram of 'A Crime!'), this new test is apparently being marketed in areas that used to be part of the USSR.

Understandably, the validity of the project is strongly disputed by all CEFR-based authorities, who are deeply suspicious of any developments from across the border, particularly in view of their lack of reliability in testing situations in the past. For this reason, an application is reported to have been submitted to EALTA and IATEFL to set up a new ESP SIG (English to Support Peace).

For language teachers and testing theory experts alike, it is worthwhile analysing the linguistic basis for ROP, which displays several special features:

# Unlike conventional standardized tests based on authentic INPUT, ROP is strictly and exclusively based on authentic PUTIN.

# The grammar syllabus has been revised to meet the needs of the occupational context. The following features are worthy of special mention:

+ imperatives (the introduction of new continuous imperative forms is planned)

+ subordinate clauses and other subordinating structures

+ a clear emphasis on passive voice forms with (undercover) agents

+ a high dominance of masculine forms, the more masculine the better

+ all utterances incorporate demonstratives, possessives, and negatives

Furthermore, for assimilation-enhancement purposes several grammatical phenomena are being "eliminated". For example:

+ Conditional sentences are not permitted. Everything is unconditional.

+ Subordinate clauses of concession have been excluded

+ Looking towards the future, should Russian for "Occupational" Purposes fulfil its linguistic aims, the plan is to eliminate regional variations, contractions, post-modifiers, back-shift, and flexibility for borderline candidates.

# In line with a new unauthorized version of the CEFR known as the *Communist European Framework of Reverence*, successful candidates will be awarded A1 Marx, A2 Marx, B1 Marx, B2 Marx, C1 Marx or C2 Marx depending on the total number of marks they achieve.

# To accommodate self-access learners the ROP Board is in the process of preparing an informal self-assessment *vade mecum*, which will consist of several "You can't do", "You won't do" and "You mustn't do" statements.

The first reactions from affected areas are less than positive. In the words of a spokesperson: "ROP will not be accepted! It will be **de-tested**."



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