Special supplement: the Summer School Rankings

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Reading the room

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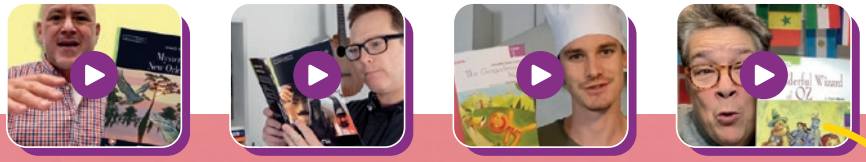

BLACK CAT

The power of reading

Can we settle the debate on the best way to teach bilingual children to read?

Happy (belated) new year!

For us at the *Gazette*, this year is a time of positive change! In 2024, we will be upgrading to six issues, which means you can expect even more amazing articles, comments, and reviews from your peers and colleagues in the ELT sector! Of course, you'll still find some familiar content – including our famous rankings and research – alongside some fresh faces and special features.

Starting the year strong, this issue is focused on reading, with a plethora of industry specialists weighing in on the topic. On page 8, you will find our usual research news is centred on phonics, looking at all the evidence in the 'reading wars'.

> "How can we use the controversial teaching method effectively, if at all?"

Phonics is also the focus on pages 26 to 29, as experts in literacy and education discuss the socio-cultural barriers to reading and the use of phonics with bilingual learners. How can we use the controversial teaching method effectively, if at all?

But, when it comes right down to it, how do we make reading fun? Well, Dr Willy Renandya and Dr George Jacobs believe the answer may lie with graded readers. Don't groan just yet! Consider their defence over on page 30.

Meanwhile, on page 12, we have an exclusive interview with the Head of EdTech Innovation at the British Council, Adam Edmett. We'll be asking all about his work with disadvantaged communities, and what the future may hold for EdTech. Plus, have a look at page 14 for our extensive list of this year's events in teaching and business.

Last, but most certainly not least, we're looking ahead to summer in our Special Supplement! This year, we're asking who are the best schools to attend *and* to work for. Head over to page 17 to find out who has come out on top!

All this and more in your *EL Gazette*!

LAUREN BILLINGS, EDITOR

Where are you going this summer?

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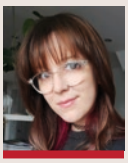

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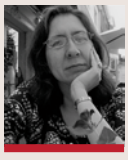

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What is the real price of ELT…

…and is it possible to subsidise the cost?

Back in December, an intriguing and divisive article appeared in the *Guardian*. The article, titled 'English still rules the world, but that's not necessarily okay', was written by lecturer in public policy and administration at the University of Ulster, Michele Gazzola. In it, Michele discusses the position of the English language in today's modern world, and the implications it has for those who speak it as a second language. Specifically, Michele says there is a real cost, financially and socially, to both countries and individuals.

In Europe, most countries teach English as a second language, with around 5-15% of their education budget allotted to foreign languages. The EU, specifically, encourages each member state to teach at least two foreign languages. Meanwhile, the UK has continued to see its own foreign languages budget consistently slashed. After all, when everyone else speaks English, do British kids really need to learn French, German or Spanish?

For many, the response to this information may well be 'so what?'. After all, the emphasis on foreign language education is beyond our control. Further, for ourselves and our readers, ELT is how we put food on the table! Well, there may be one solution…

In his article, Michele talks about the 'linguistic tax', a theoretical strategy initially proposed by Philippe Van Parijs of the University of Louvain. The idea is deceptively simple: English-speaking countries would pay a 'global tax', with the revenue distributed to countries where English is taught as a second language. Of course, the implementation of such a tax is essentially impossible, says Michele, requiring some sort of 'world government' to collect and distribute the cash.

> "Want to save money? 'Just don't teach something'"

Regardless, the *Gazette* was intrigued by this proposal and approached Michele to discover more about the factors that inspired the theory.

The true cost

So where do these costs come from? The immediate conclusion may be that the countries who teach English require more classroom hours. However, evidence suggests this isn't the case.

In 2018 the OECD data on classroom hours showed Australia had the highest number of classroom hours (over 11,000), nearly twice as many as Hungary (around 6,000). The USA, the UK, Canada and New Zealand are all in the top ten for long hours. Ireland comes in at number 11.

Well, according to Michele, it's easy to spend less on foreign languages if you simply are not paying anyone to teach it. Michele also notes a significant lack of foreign language teachers in the UK. In 2022, Professor Becky Muradás-Taylor from the University of Leeds gave a talk at the British Association of Applied Linguistics (BAAL). In it, she stated that even if everyone currently studying foreign languages in the UK became a teacher, the UK would still not

have enough foreign language teachers for the school system.

Want to save money? 'Just don't teach something,' says Michele.

That may well be the case for state education. But what about higher education?

'Universities are extremely interested in international rankings,' says Michele. 'This is because the percentage of foreign students is an indicator of "quality".

'The problem is you attract international students who don't learn the local language and then are likely to go elsewhere. Countries are educating doctors and engineers who leave and don't pay back into the economy. In the short term, it is good for universities, but there is a long term cost.'

Michele went on to say that, for some sectors, English is quickly becoming the dominant language. Some countries run higher education courses almost entirely in English, putting those who may not be able to speak English as well as their peers at a disadvantage, and perhaps even unable to access higher education at all. This is particularly true for those already from a disadvantaged socio-economic background.

However, if you do speak English, then you should have nothing to worry about, right? Well, research suggests there may be poorer learning outcomes for students who learn in English as opposed to their native language. A recent study from Sweden found students taking a course in English were more likely to have lower scores and drop-out than their peers taking the exact same course in Swedish.

> "Countries are educating doctors and engineers who leave and don't pay back into the economy"

There can also be a financial cost on the individual, says Michele; academic writers who speak English as a second language are more likely to have to amend their work on account of spelling and grammar. To avoid this, they may find themselves paying out of pocket for an editor.

Well, why do researchers not just write their papers in their native language? Michele tell us it's not quite that simple:

'There is little incentive for research papers to be written in any language other than English. Articles and papers in English are far more likely to be cited, and citations contribute to rankings, so journals will squeeze out other languages.'

Would it even work?

The *Gazette* was quick to wonder what the reaction would be from certain countries to a linguistic tax.

On paper, taxes would be taken from all countries whose official language is English. However, 'it would exclude countries where English is an official language, but not as widely spoken as a native language, such as India,' says Michele.

Therefore, Ireland, a country who speaks English due to colonisation, and Canada, a country where French is widely spoken alongside English, would be included in the tax. Michele concedes Canada may well be complicated. 'In this case,' he says, 'only the provinces where English is most widely spoken would be taxed.'

For now, in the absence of a world government to enforce such a tax, Michele tells us there may be realistic ways to bridge this financial gap that some countries have actually already implemented.

One way is for governments to implement a law surrounding patents, wherein patents filed in English may be shorter, cost more, or be free for a certain period of time. Some elements of this strategy already exist in South Korea, where the national patent office charge higher fees if some services are requested in English rather than Korean. If European countries implemented similar laws, it could be the first step to subsidising the cost of English education.

So, as English continues to rule the world, do you agree with Michele that it might be high time to 'curb its power'?

Phonics and the battle for literacy: experts cross pens in the 'Reading Wars'!

*Should we be using phonics in the classroom? Research editor, **Gill Ragsdale** weighs up the evidence...*

Round 1: a closer look at the evidence

A thorough 2020 review of both research meta-analyses and English schools' results found no support for the use of systematic phonics being clearly superior in teaching reading, according to Professor of Neuroscience at Bristol University, Jeffrey Bowers.

Despite becoming a legal requirement across English state schools in 2007, the debate generally referred to as 'the Reading Wars' still rages over whether the use of systematic phonics (SP) in primary schools is really the most efficient way to teach young children to read, as opposed to other alternatives such as the 'whole language' approach focussing on the meaning of words, supported by ad hoc use of phonics as deemed necessary.

Bowers' review sought to evaluate previous research and results afresh to determine whether claims that SP was the best method of instruction were truly valid. Two approaches were taken do this. Firstly, checking the analyses and conclusions from the existing 12 meta-analyses (each one in itself an analysis and review of forgoing research) and secondly, looking at schools' Phonics Screen Check (PSC) scores and their relation to outcomes such as schools' Standardised Assessment Tests (SATs) scores.

A major recurring criticism of the previous meta-analyses was that many studies did not actually test whether SP led to *better* outcomes, as they did not make the necessary comparisons, such as to an appropriate alternative method and/or control. Furthermore, Bowers identified several cases where the statistical analyses may have been poorly interpreted; for example, by implying that the effect size of the SP method could be distinguished as significantly larger than another method when in fact this could not be concluded. Consequently, according to Bowers, these meta-analyses were not able to conclude overall that SP was definitely *more* efficient as a method of reading instruction.

Further evidence used in support of SP is the rise in England's schools' PSC scores and their ranking in an international league table using the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores.

To meet the required standard, PSCs require children in year one to initially respond accurately to 80% of a 32-item list, and it is clear that scores have improved: 58% of year one pupils met the standard in 2012, rising to 82% in 2018. But did this translate into better reading outcomes? Looking at SAT scores over this timeframe showed no general relationship between learning to use phonics and actual literacy.

Looking at longer-term influences, English schools' PISA ranking did improve from fifteenth in 2006 to eighth in 2016. Bowers points out that the ranking had previously been higher – third in 2001 – and that Northern Ireland's schools consistently outrank England's despite no mention of SP in their curriculum, which tends towards mixed methods. Furthermore, when taking out the data from private schools, the ranking in 2016 drops from eighth to eleventh place.

Overall, Bowers concluded that the issue is not whether SP is effective so much as whether it is more effective than other methods, and consequently whether more time and funding could be used to look at these other options and make a fuller assessment. Most troubling of all, given that a major criticism of SP is that it takes the joy out of learning to read, is that

in an international ranking of children's enjoyment of reading, England's schools ranked thirty-fourth, the lowest of all English-speaking countries.

Round 2: a rebuttal against doubt

In 2023, Professor of Education at Sheffield University, Greg Brooks, disputed Bowers' assertion that there was no evidence of systematic phonics being better than other methods for teaching literacy in primary schools.

Brooks is a long-standing advocate for SP and member of several advisory groups on education and literacy. Brooks took particular issue with Bowers' re-interpretation of four of the meta-analyses in his article, claiming that overall, 'the evidence in favour of systematic phonics instruction seems robust'.

However, when the debate depends on such nuanced interpretation of statistical analyses, it could call into question just how 'robust' the evidence really is.

Round 3: a counter-response in defence of alternatives

Professor Bowers' 2023 reply countered Brooks' criticism of his 2020 paper that cast doubt on the supremacy of systematic phonics (SP) in teaching literacy. Bowers countered Brooks criticism of his statistical reinterpretation of previous meta-analyses and also offered some further recent

evidence in support of his argument undermining confidence in SP.

Another score which has been taken to support the impact of SP is the International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) which tests reading comprehension: England moved up from eighth position in 2016 to fourth in 2021, leading one education commentator to write:

'The UK Government made the Year One Phonics Screening Check mandatory in English schools in 2012. There is good evidence suggesting that the Phonics Screening Check played a significant role in England's improved performance in the most recent PIRLS assessment.'

However, Bowers points out that the biggest increase in PIRLS scores occurred between 2006 and 2011, before the use of the PSC; in fact, the 2021 score is only slightly improved on 2001. Furthermore, England is consistently outranked by countries that are not required to use SP and do not have a PSC, such as Singapore, Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The debate between Professors Bowers and Brooks can be seen repeated by many other researchers, teachers and other experts across the literature and seems set to continue. It may be relevant here to note the different academic backgrounds of the protagonists in the cited articles. As a neuroscientist, Bowers' research investigates how word knowledge is learned and coded in the brain while Brooks was an experienced teacher who moved into education research, principally focussing on the use of phonics. Experienced researchers in any field tend to have favoured angles, but perhaps the view from neuroscience has less invested, hence Bowers remarking: 'The "reading wars" that pitted systematic phonics against whole language is best characterized as a draw.'

Phonics: seeing is believing

When teaching pre-schoolers phonics, being able to see visual cues such as the speaker's gestures and mouth movements improves learning grapheme-phoneme correspondence, according to a study by Novelli, Ardoin and Rodgers from the Universities of Georgia and Iowa, USA.

Five four-year-old US pre-school students took part in the study, having two 10-minute sessions per day, five days per week for 36 days. Phonemes were initially modelled by the instructor. Students were then asked 'what sound?' when presented with cards showing various graphemes and accuracy was recorded by an observer without immediate feedback.

Assessments were carried out under three conditions, one where the student could see the instructor's mouth and gestures, one where the instructor's mouth was hidden behind a mask and they could not see the instructor's gestures, and also a control condition to gauge overall improvements.

Analysis of the results showed that while students generally made good progress in acquiring grapheme-phoneme associations in both conditions, their acquisition improved nearly twice as much when they were able to see the instructor's mouth and gestures; something to consider given the increasing use of computer-assisted learning, use of two-dimensional cartoon models and the use of masks during the COVID pandemic.

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The grammar discovery approach

*In this article, teacher **Joanna Buckle** delves into the grammar discovery approach. But what is it and does it work?*

One nineties development in English language teaching was the 'grammar discovery' approach. It's now been around long enough to have been incorporated into a number of textbooks. In this method, students are given a set of examples of a particular grammar point, such as the present simple tense, and asked to extrapolate the rules for its use from the context. But how much theoretical backing does this approach have?

The grammar discovery approach appears to be inspired by the popular vocabulary teaching method of guessing the meaning of new vocabulary in context. However, it is difficult to see the necessity of such a time-consuming process where grammar is concerned. It may be an attempt to compensate for the very old-fashioned perspective that language teaching is basically the teaching of grammar in the form of tables of conjugations and so on, sometimes known as focus on form or forms. From this, often unstated, and uninformed, point of view, teaching anything else is seen as a sign that the teacher doesn't really understand grammar well enough to teach it.

On the other hand, modern language teachers tend to rely on the findings of the field of second language acquisition, and the lexical approach, to inform their teaching. Language is seen as a collection of set phrases, acquired from infancy onwards, and deployed by a speaker or writer to construct meaning. These collocations can be learnt as 'chunks' of language, as naturally occurs in first language acquisition, and deployed for the purpose of communication. This is seen as potentially a more successful route to second language acquisition than a focus on grammar.

But in terms of the rationale behind the grammar discovery approach, while structured, planned, and manageable 'guessing meaning in context' activities are frequently used for vocabulary, they are only a small part of an extensive reading course that focuses mainly on reading for gist, or scanning and skimming. This approach would of course be combined with explicit vocabulary teaching, whether as self-study or classwork.

The reason for teaching this strategy is to discourage teachers and learners from reading everything carefully, because this is not what readers do in academia, or as they learn to read in their first language. Academic readers, and all proficient readers, have to deal with vast quantities of reading material, without feeling that they must look up every unfamiliar word, or even read more than a chapter, or a paragraph, of a book they have selected.

While dictionary work is valuable in a piece of writing that must be studied in depth, or for some self-study, taking this approach will slow a reader down to the point where they give up. Praising a learner for locating the one piece of information they can understand in a difficult text is far more helpful. After all, think of the way students read and reference works in higher education; we choose the books and articles that we think will be helpful, and simply skim read for the main topic, using the title and topic sentences, and scan for a specific word or phrase, to find a viewpoint that will back up or refute our ideas.

The same does not apply to the teaching of grammar, which is not something that first language learners consciously extrapolate from context. Therefore, an inductive approach is not necessary. As the field of second language acquisition demonstrates, young children take a few years to practice forming sentences before they automatically rule out incorrect grammar options. We do not teach much grammar in English language classes in UK schools, beyond

naming basic word types and so on, for this reason. Therefore, the strategy many English language instructors are tentatively inching towards is dropping grammar teaching altogether in favour of a skills- and vocabulary-based approach.

Whether or not a skills-based approach is more effective, teaching grammar points through guided discovery does not seem to have a sound theoretical basis, and seems to be rather frustrating and time-consuming for teacher and learners alike. The grammar discovery method appears to originate from the findings of modern research into language teaching, which appear to suggest that explicit grammar teaching may not be necessary at all.

However, most students are used to being taught language through the use of verb tables and so on, and tend to be reassured by the explicit presentation of these language features in class. And considering that adult language learning is more challenging than that for a small child, it is probably better to use a little traditional grammar teaching to give your learners confidence and maintain your credibility as a language teacher for learners that may know nothing about modern language teaching methodology. Unfortunately, thinking of the numbers of language learners from traditional education systems, who may not see the purpose of learning a foreign language as communication, this may mean most learners.

Whether dialect speakers should have to learn the grammar of Standard English is another debate, but as it is acquired naturally with extensive listening and reading, it is probably simpler for all to keep one form of English as the written standard in Britain and Ireland. Significantly different dialects, such as Scottish English, certainly profit from being recorded in writing, such as the dialect poetry of Robert Burns. However, entire books in a less widely-spoken non-standard dialect of English can be difficult to read fluently, and probably would be confusing even for speakers of the dialect.

Those who are widely-read will pick up the fact that written English needs to be in the standard form, though this may be more difficult for dialect speakers. However, education in English language classes into the historical and ethnic basis for the regional varieties of English, and some examination of texts in dialect in the course of the regular syllabus, such as the excellent 'Penguin Book of Caribbean Poetry in English' would have an enormous effect in countering the wide-spread prejudice against speakers of regional working-class dialects that is only now being reduced through the British media, with comedians such as Johnny Vegas and Mickey Flanagan. Without some explanation of their historical origins, it tends to be assumed that dialect speakers are simply ignorant, and incapable of or untrained in speaking Standard English and using the grammar.

But certainly, what no first language learner does, either as a baby or in high school, is try to consciously extrapolate the rules for grammar use from the context. In first language learning, grammatical structures are acquired through years of avid listening, in other words, years of exposure to vast quantities of input in context, and it is the language acquisition device in the mind postulated by Chomsky in his theory of universal grammar that successfully captures the language accurately. Students and teachers alike tend to be confused by exercises that ask them to use the grammar discovery method, and it seems probable that an inductive method is often ineffective for the teaching of structures.

Joanna Buckle *has worked as an English language teacher for nine years, most recently for The American University of Sharjah. She has an MA in English Language Teaching and is currently studying Journalism at The University of West England. Joanna has previously published five articles on the topic of ELT.*

Inclusion and exclusion in EdTech

*How can EdTech create opportunities for those from disadvantaged backgrounds? We chat with **Adam Edmett**, Head of EdTech Innovation at the British Council, to get his thoughts…*

Q: Firstly, congratulations on your 'Best use of mobile learning' bronze at the Learning Technologies Awards! Your award was for the use of tablets to support English teachers in unsafe environments. Could you explain more about this project and the lead-up to your deserving win?

Thank you! This was from a project in Rwanda working with teachers on their digital literacy and language proficiency levels. Along with the LTA award, there was an A+ rating from the funder: the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

One of the main reasons we had this success was because we provided both data and devices to tackle infrastructure and compatibility issues. When you work with mobile technologies, it's not a straightforward technical proposition. It may seem simple but it really isn't. For example, many Learning Management System suppliers promise offline solutions but once you take these out into the field they do not always live up to expectations. Offline access to content is very important for people with variable access to Wi-Fi or where the cost of data is a consideration. Our UK tech partner eCom Learning Solutions had won awards in this area previously, so that's one of the reasons we teamed up. We've been able to work closely on getting things right in challenging tech environments.

Q: The British Council have also worked with eCom in the past on their English and Digital for Girls' through Education (EDGE) programme. Could you tell us more about how this project has affected girls from disadvantaged backgrounds?

EDGE has reached over 20,000 adolescent girls in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. These girls – all of whom are either currently out-of-school or living in socio-economically marginalised communities – are using innovative learning techniques to gain English and digital skills which, in turn, give them confidence and agency in their communities.

The data that we've collected from EDGE club participants show that after completing two thirds of the programme they demonstrate significant improvement in English language speaking ability, and progress from zero IT knowledge to being able to perform basic tasks on computers, using MS office and the internet. The peer group learning model has also given the girls improved levels of confidence and self-esteem, and more awareness of social issues that affect their communities.

Q: Throughout your career, what ways have you seen EdTech benefit and present new opportunities for learners around the world?

I started in the field over a quarter of a century ago! That timeframe encompasses the dawn of some fundamentally transformative technologies. So, of course, access to 'learning' has increased exponentially. But also very important for education was the moment that we moved from the internet as a more or less one directional source of read only information or Web 1.0, through to Web 2.0 and the connecting of people and co-creation of knowledge.

I remember the early online learning communities I was part of as being very exciting places. It felt like the world was on the brink of something completely new. That wasn't quite how it panned out, so nowadays I'm slightly wary of getting carried away with the next big thing! Even with the current hype around the next phase - Web 3.0, which promises entirely new opportunities for interaction through technologies such as AI, machine learning and the Semantic Web. Still exciting though!

Q: We know EdTech has many benefits for students, globally. However, what are the potential challenges that come with distance or digital learning?

THE challenge is inclusivity. This could be a lack of device access, low to no connectivity, poor digital literacy levels, and even self-regulation aspects like motivation and resilience that are more important when you move away from face-to-face teaching. As digital reach extends so does inclusion, but simultaneously, exclusion. Some of the teachers in our project in Rwanda had never accessed the internet previously. That's staggering when you think about how connected our lives can be today.

Q: Feedback from across the world suggests that, during COVID, children who were taught online had poorer learning outcomes than previous cohorts. What evidence is there that under-16s would learn language as well online as they do face-to-face with teachers and peers?

There are many things at play here which might have influenced those results. For example, there was the impact of COVID itself on everyone's mental health. I still don't think we fully realise the impact the pandemic had on all of us. We cope, that's what humans do, but I don't think the full impact is evident.

In terms of whether online can work as well as, or better, than face-to-face for language learning, I'm not aware of any evidence that would be generalisable beyond it working for some individuals in certain contexts and situations: as the saying goes, everything works somewhere but nothing works everywhere.

Q: In the adult market there is a high level of student drop-out for distance learning. High rates of attrition can be a very attractive business model as long as students either pay in advance or sign-up for a subscription service; similar to the business models used by fitness centres. How do you reduce attrition?

Attrition rates do vary. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are the worst offenders – some put the completion rates at just 3-6% – but that's partly because they are free and easy to sign up for.

From years of experience, we know that providing a blend of face-to-face and online course dramatically improves the chances of learner engagement, along with other factors such as support with onboarding, how a course is structured, qualifications awarded, and whether there is a moderator and active online community of learners. Let's face it, keeping learners engaged in pure self-access mode is the hardest task of all. Perhaps AI powered tech will help, but I have doubts that it can replace that part of education that really makes it life changing.

Q: What is the future you envision for EdTech and digital learning worldwide and how do you plan on achieving it?

Simply put, we need to include everyone, and on their terms, not ours. I recently attended the World Innovation Summit for Education in Qatar which had an AI focus. Pelonomi Moiloa spoke about her organisation's work building large language models for underserved languages in Africa. This is a necessary response to US dominated Big Tech and the well documented issues around non-representation and cultural bias. There will need to be a lot of grassroots, context specific work like this for an equitable AI powered future. The British Council has a global presence and is on the ground in more than 100 countries. We are in a privileged position to support and promote this fully inclusive digital future.

Dr Adam Edmett is Head of EdTech Innovation for the British Council and currently based in Doha, Qatar. Adam has 27 years' experience in English language teaching and digital learning technology, with roles in 14 countries. He has a doctorate from the University of Bath and an MA from the Open University, both in Online Education.

Get together

This year's events in teaching and business, at a glance.

Whether you're looking to network, want to know what's trending right now in ELT, or would like to improve and learn as a teacher, we have created an extensive list of some of the top events going on in 2024.

While most are in-person, some events will be online only. Others, such as The Forum on Education Abroad's Annual Conference, include a virtual event to coincide with their in-person talks. Any virtual events alongside in-person events have (online) beside their name.

One to watch out for is World Teachers' Day on 5 October! Every year on this special day, TeachingEnglish host webinars from key speakers to encourage growth and development. Last year saw talks on role-play in the classroom, social-emotional learning and reflective practice. If you can't wait for October, TeachingEnglish host all their webinars online from last year through to 2016.

The hot topic this year is shaping up to be EdTech and AI. Organisers who have made this their focus include TESOL in Costa Rica, English UK in London, ICEF in Germany and the Language Centre at Hong Kong Baptist University. How can we use ever-advancing tech to our advantage as teachers?

The events below are split into the following regions for clarity and conciseness: Online; Americas; UK and Ireland; EMEA; Asia and Oceania. So, read on to see what's happening in a conference centre near you!

Online

Event	Organiser	Date
20th Annual Conference (Online)	The Forum on Education Abroad	6-Mar
Youth Travel Workshop	BETA	11-Mar
Members' Conference & AGM (Online)	English UK	17-May
Convention ACPI-TESOL-IATEFL 2024 (Online)	ACPI-TESOL	4-Jul
StudyWorld Online	StudyWorld	18-Sep
World Teachers' Day	TeachingEnglish	5-Oct

Americas

Event	Organiser	Date	Location
ICEF Mexico - Colombia Roadshow	ICEF	4-Mar	Mexico City, **Mexico** & Bogotá, **Colombia**
ST Alphe Brazil	Study Travel	13-Mar	São Paulo, **Brazil**
The Forum 20th Annual Conference	The Forum on Education Abroad	20-Mar	Boston MA, **USA**
TESOL24	TESOL	21-Mar	Tampa FL, **USA**
ICEF North America	ICEF	1-May	Niagara Falls, **Canada**
NAFSA 2024 Annual Conference & Expo	NAFSA	28-May	New Orleans LA, **USA**
CARLA: LTE Conference 2024	CARLA, Uni of Minnesota	30-May	Minneapolis MN, **USA**
CONVENTION ACPI-TESOL-IATEFL 2024	ACPI-TESOL	3-Jul	San José, **Costa Rica**
ICEF Brazil	ICEF	3-Oct	São Paulo, **Brazil**
Biregional I and II Conference	NAFSA	6-Oct	Vancouver, **Canada**
Region III Conference	NAFSA	14-Oct	St Shreveport LA, **USA**
Region VI Conference	NAFSA	27-Oct	Cincinnati OH, **USA**
Biregional IV and V Conference	NAFSA	29-Oct	Schaumburg IL, **USA**
ST Alphe Secondary Focus	Study Travel	16-Nov	Mexico City, **Mexico**
The PIE Live North America	The PIE	19-Nov	Boston MA, **USA**

UK and Ireland

Event	Organiser	Date	Location
ELT Conference	English UK	1-Mar	London, **UK**
ST Alphe Ireland	Study Travel	6-Mar	Dublin, **Ireland**
The PIE Live Europe	The PIE	19-Mar	London, **UK**
IATEFL International Conference	IATEFL	16-Apr	Brighton, **UK**
ST Alphe Secondary Focus	Study Travel	18-Apr	London, **UK**
Members' Conference & AGM	English UK	17-May	London, **UK**
English Language Teachers' Summer Seminar	University of Oxford	21-Jul	Oxford, **UK**
ST Alphe UK	Study Travel	30-Aug	London, **UK**
Marketing Conference	English UK	Sep	London, **UK**
The ICEF Global Higher Education Summit	ICEF	23-Sep	London, **UK**
Youth and Student Travel Summit	BETA	Oct	Manchester, **UK**

EMEA

Event	Organiser	Date	Location
3rd Albania IP Exhibition	International Publishers	2-Mar	Tirana, **Albania**
TESOL-SPAIN	TESOL Spain	8-Mar	Cáceres, **Spain**
ICEF Eurasia	ICEF	25-Mar	Istanbul, **Turkey**
Cyprus IP Exhibition	International Publishers	30-Mar	Limassol, **Cyprus**
ST Alphe Istanbul	Study Travel	5-Apr	Istanbul, **Turkey**
Thessaloniki IP Exhibition	International Publishers	7-Apr	Thessaloniki, **Greece**
Athens IP Exhibition	International Publishers	13-Apr	Athens, **Greece**
ICEF Spanish Education	ICEF	22-May	Madrid, **Spain**
ICEF Africa	ICEF	2-Jul	Kigali, **Rwanda**
ICEF Secondary Education	ICEF	14-Sep	Rome, **Italy**
ST Alphe Secondary Focus	Study Travel	4-Oct	Frankfurt, **Germany**
EMEA Conference	The Forum on Education Abroad	16-Oct	Athens, **Greece**
ICEF Digital	ICEF	2-Nov	Berlin, **Germany**
ICEF Berlin	ICEF	3-Nov	Berlin, **Germany**

Asia and Oceania

Event	Organiser	Date	Location
ICEF ANZA	ICEF	22-Apr	Christchurch, **New Zealand**
ICEF South East Asia	ICEF	11-Jun	Ho Chi Minh City, **Vietnam**
ICEF Philippines	ICEF	16-Jun	Manila, **Philippines**
Language Centre Conference	Language Centre, Hong Kong Baptist Uni	17-Jun	Kowloon, **Hong Kong**
Task-Based Language Teaching in Asia	JALT TBL SIG	5-Jul	Nagoya, **Japan**
The PIE Live Australia	The PIE	29-Jul	Queensland, **Australia**
English Australia Conference 2023	English Australia	30-Aug	Sydney, **Australia**
ST Alphe Perth	Study Travel	8-Sep	Perth, **Australia**
StudyWorld China Roadshow	StudyWorld	14-Nov	Chengdu, Beijing & Shanghai, **China**
ST Alphe Korea	Study Travel	9-Dec	Seoul, **South Korea**
ST Alphe Japan	Study Travel	11-Dec	Tokyo, **Japan**

Information correct as of 20 February 2024. All events recorded here were compiled through the *Gazette*'s own research. If you are hosting an event you believe we have missed, please do not hesitate to get in contact.

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Looking forward to summer!

The top summer schools for both students and staff

el·gazette

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All sunshine and rainbows

It may be February, but we're already looking forward to summer!

It's that time again; time for summer schools to start recruiting for both students and staff. So, we're asking: who are the best summer schools to attend *and* to work for this year?

On page 21 you'll find our 2024 UK summer school rankings. If you're familiar with our rankings tables, you'll probably see some familiar faces and maybe even some newbies! But who came out on top? It's shaping up to be a battle of the boarders and the chains!

Looking for a residential teaching job instead? We've tallied up the best institutions in the UK to work for. You can find out which schools pay the best and provide the clearest job specs, plus everything you need to know when handing in your applications on page 24!

Outside of the UK, where might you be looking to spend your summer? If the answer is Malta or Ireland, better get a move on; these two hugely popular destinations are quick to fill up! But what is it about them that's so attractive? We take a deeper look over on page 23.

As always, happy summer and happy reading!

Contents

Reading the rankings

Have a look to see how we calculate our summer school scores…

All EL Gazette rankings of language schools are based on British Council Inspection Reports.

Normally UK summer school rankings are easy to compile because all the operations are inspected in the same 15 areas; there is no need for complex algorithms. Before COVID, to rank summer schools all we did was count the number of strengths awarded in the British Council summary statements and deduct all the areas with a Need for Improvement. That is still the case for the operations marked in blue on our ranking which chose to undergo a full inspection.

Others opted for a post-COVID compliance inspection. In a compliance report, inspectors do not award strengths in any criteria inspected and so cannot award a strength in any area. It does mark criteria as Not Met and, if there are enough Not Mets in the same area, a Need for Improvement is noted on the full report, but not on the summary statements.

The Gazette noticed little variation in the scores of high-ranking schools with full reports from before and after COVID. Some went up a point, some went down a point, and some had new areas with a Need for Improvement. So, since the results seemed stable, in last year's rankings we simply deducted any new Needs for Improvement on a compliance report from the number of strengths the school had previously had. A school cannot go up with a compliance inspection but can go down.

Any schools in our table shown in red underwent a compliance inspection and we have deducted any Needs for Improvement from their score.

The full reports in 2023, however, began to show instability in full Inspection results. A few went up a little but most schools' scores fell three or four points; some chains saw average drops of five or six. One school fell 13 points.

Research suggest the cause was an increase in the number of criteria marked Not Met. Under the British Council system, if one criterion is marked Not Met in a given area, an area of strength cannot be awarded.

This year, to level the playing field, we decided to limit the score in a compliance inspection to the number of areas which were free of Not Mets. A few schools have gone down a point or two, while a couple have dropped out the ranking.

You still cannot go up on a compliance inspection, but now you can go further down.

Summer school rankings 2024

Score x/15	Name	Type	Age	Centres	Accom.	Last report
15	Summer Boarding Courses	SSS	6+	6	Both	2023
14	Bell YL	Chain	7+	5	R	2023
14	Broadstairs EC	YLS	11+	1	Both	2019
13	ELC Chester	Chain	14+	1	NR	2019
12	Discovery Summer	SSS	5+	5	Both	2023
12	Loxdale EC	PLS	8+	1	NR	2020
12	St Clare's, Oxford	BS	9+	2	R	2023
11	Exsportise	SSS	9+	5	R	2019
11	Harrow Summer	BS	9+	1	R	2019
11	Heathfield Summer	BS	8+	1	R	2022
11	Isca School of English	YLS	14+	1	NR	2022
10	Bede's Summer	BS	6+	6	Both	2022
10	English Country Schools	SSS	8+	1	R	2023
10	King's Summer	Chain	8+	5	R	2019
10	Language in Action	Chain	14+	10	R	2022
10	Sherborne Intl.	BS	8+	1	R	2019
10	Wimbledon YL	PLS	8+	4	Both	2022
9	Bucksmore Ed.	YLS	8+	6	R	2021
9	English Experience	PLS	11+	1	NR	2019
9	IH London	PLS	8+	5	Both	2019
9	Millfield	BS	8+	2	R	2023
9	St Brelade's	PLS	12+	2	Both	2022
8	Bell St Albans	Chain	7+	1	R	2023
8	Brook House College	BS	10+	1	R	2019
8	Intl. Students' Club	SSS	9+	1	R	2022
8	St Edmunds	BS	9+	1	R	2022
8	Stafford House	Chain	8+	8	Both	2023

Key

EC: English Centre
YL: Young Learners
PLS: Private Language School
YLS: Young Learners Specialist
R: Residential
Blue: Full report
ELC: English Language Centre
BS: Boarding School
SSS: Summer school specialist
NR: Non Residential
Red: Compliance report

The information on this table is based on British Council inspection reports as of 8 February 2024. These can be found at britishcouncil.org/education/accreditation/centres.

Specialists top the summer school charts

We take a closer look at this year's summer school rankings...

Stafford House Study Holidays is our only one new entrant in this year's summer rankings. The reason is simple: of the 28 summer operations inspected, only 12 underwent full inspections.

Of those 12, three schools saw a drop in their scores, and one boarding school, St Clare's Oxford, saw their score go up. Stafford House, a chain which has seen its inspection results improve across the board, is a welcome newcomer.

The full results for top-ranking summer schools were more stable than those in the EFL sector as a whole. Our research shows that, of the 27 accredited language centres who had a full re-inspection in 2023, 21 saw their results fall, three remained the same and only three went up.

As we mentioned on page 20, compliance inspections do not cover areas of strength and, although areas with a Need for Improvement are noted on the full report, they do not appear on the summary statements. The *Gazette* has always deducted areas which need improving from our ranking scores. This year, to further level the playing field, we have also deducted the number of areas ineligible for a strength on full inspections from all schools.

The types of operators who dominate the tables remain the same: boarding schools like St Edmunds, Harrow and Heathfield, and summer school specialists like SBC and Discovery Summer. Year-round young learner specialist, Broadstairs English Centre, and small family-run operations like ISCA and Manor courses also do well.

Apart from those with a long experience of young learners, like Bell, most chains score less well on summer operations. However, Language in Action breaks the mould as the highest-ranking operation in the Malvern House Group.

A small number of year-round high-ranking Language Schools, like ELC Chester and Loxdale, run excellent non-residential options while year-round star Wimbledon School of English is making inroads into the residential summer sector.

The most surprising trend emerging in rankings, though, is the number of top summer schools taking children under the age of eight.

Discovery Summer takes five-year-olds, but only for a non-residential course option known as 'day camps'. This growing niche covers children of foreign parents living in the UK, often attending a language course themselves.

But the age of boarders is also dropping; Bede's Summer is taking boarders from the age of six at its Eastbourne Prep school, as independent schools for juniors are known. Wimbledon School of English also uses a prep school for its eight to 11-year-old's summer camp, and Millfield's Prep school in Glastonbury is opening again this summer.

Britain has always educated five to 11 years olds (or 13 in the case of independent preps) separately from older children. It is safer, reduces bullying and violence and allows for courses and teachers tailored to this age group. Once again, the young learner specialists know best.

Get to know Malta and Ireland this summer!

The UK may be the biggest summer EFL destination, but two far smaller European countries – Ireland and Malta – are also hugely popular. Why?

1) **Ease of arrival.** Getting to **Malta and Ireland** is simple **for EU nationals**: no visas and no passports; EU nationals can travel with an ID and there's no currency exchange. Both boast regular flights from European countries and, increasingly, from major markets in Latin America and Asia.
2) **Safety. Malta** has very low crime rates and Ireland is at the European average, just below the UK.
3) **Child protection.** Teachers in Malta need an ELT Permit which must include police checks from Malta or their country of origin. The Irish school association MEI arranges police vetting for host families and Irish staff. Foreign staff must provide evidence of police checks. In the **UK** – where child protection is known as safeguarding – British Council inspectors check staff and host families have undergone specialist training.
4) **Cost of living. Malta** has the cheapest cost of living just around the average for the EU. Ireland has the second-highest cost of living in the EU and is more expensive than the UK, outside of London.
5) **Cost of courses.** This is difficult to check. We looked at six schools in each country; no Irish schools listed prices and only one in Malta did. A price list for agents from an operator working in all three countries showed Ireland was marginally cheaper than the UK, and **Malta** was significantly cheaper than both. However, agents are likely to pay less than individual students. In the **UK**, British Council accredited centres must make the prices clear on their website.
6) **Highly qualified teachers: Ireland** requires all teachers to have a degree alongside one of three potential training certificates. Malta allows teachers to start from age 18 and runs both its own training courses and English language tests for teachers. In the UK, British Council inspectors can accept exceptions on qualifications so they can vary from school to school.
7) **Best activities: Malta** wins on water sports, **Ireland** on riding, rugby and golf. Both have plenty of places to visit, including five Unesco World Heritage Sites each. **Malta** wins on weather and possibly food. **Ireland** on music and natural beauty. The choice is yours!
8) **Most popular destination: Ireland.** By the time you read this most of the summer school places will have been booked!

Best UK residential teaching jobs

Our research shows these residential schools have the best pay and the clearest timetables.

Name	Days	Salary	Hours covered by NMW	Teaching hours	Lesson prep + admin	Total hours quoted	Scheduled off-duty time	Other work cited	Duties not cited and/or timed
St Edmund's College ☆	6	£730.45	70	22	11	47	All evenings	None	None
Whitgift ☆	6	£710	68.25	23		45.5	After 16:30	Airport runs Pastoral care	Induction
Bede's	6	£700	67.3	Up to 25	Up to 15	55.3	After 17:30	Airport runs Pastoral care	Induction
SBC	6	£625	60.75	30	3.75	48.75	Unclear	Marking Supervision Excursions	Meetings Pastoral care Induction
British Summer Courses ☆	6	£615	60	25	Up to 15	48+	4-5.5 hours. No night duties	Airport runs Excursions Camp setup	Class breaks
Exsportise		£615	60	25	Up to 15	48+	After 17:45 Mon-Fri	Airport runs Excursions Camp setup	Class breaks
Wimbledon SoE YL		£600	59	25	Up to 15	48+	All evenings	Airport runs Excursions CPD Camp setup	Class breaks

Based on the lowest rate of pay for an EFL teacher at these schools. Data compiled from job ads plus job descriptions on operators' websites. All information correct as of 1 February 2023. Check our website for up-to-date listings and specifications.

Working time, overtime and time on-duty

How we checked our top schools and how you should check the job ads.

Summer schools desperately need teachers but the pay rates on offer vary hugely. Language school pay for residential teachers varies from £300 a week, including holiday pay, to £625 excluding it (£700.45 a week, inclusive). Boarding school-run operations range from £818 with holiday pay, down to just £376.68.

All our figures are based on the lowest pay rate on offer and exclude holiday pay which cannot be used for National Minimum Wage (NMW) calculations. Our calculations are based on the NMW of £11.44 per hour applicable to everyone aged over 20 as of 1 April this year.

> "Rule 1: Always check whether the figure on the ad excludes or includes holiday pay. If no pay figure is given, don't apply."

For the salaries provided above, **residential teachers** can add an extra £69.93 which is the amount an employer can offset for accommodation when calculating NMW. This figure can be deducted from your salary or require extra unpaid overtime, **but not both**. Next to salaries, we also give the total time available before NMW law is breached.

> "Rule 2: UK employers can require unpaid overtime but if your wages drop below NMW for the total time worked they will be in breach of the law."

Schools may claim no overtime is payable since summer school staff are salaried. For NMW purposes only workers with both annual contracts and salaries paid in equal instalments over a 12-year period qualify as 'salaried hour workers'.

So, **what is working time?** Working time covers **all actual time** spent on or at the workplace and doing any work-related task or duty, plus **all actual travelling time** and **all mandatory training** including CPD and Induction. Many schools wrongly exclude:

- **a)** meetings, time supervising children (including on breaks or at meals) and any pastoral/residential duties;
- **b)** classroom time including teaching, admin, setting up, or tidying;
- **c)** mandatory training, CPD and induction;
- **d)** lesson preparation and marking which take place at the workplace when workers are on-duty.

Our chart includes working time not mentioned or not accounted for in job descriptions. Airport runs and excursions are specified because the actual time taken may vary. As a rule of thumb, all time on-duty is working time. So we checked for off-duty time and listed it. One school, Discovery Summer, met both this requirement and our pay benchmark but we found insufficient public domain data to include it.

Lastly, any school marked with a ☆ has provided the clearest upfront information about their pay and duties!

Embracing English learners in a Science of Reading era

*What are the socio-cultural barriers to reading? Experts in literacy, **Martha Hernandez** and **Laurie Olsen** discuss the way forward for emergent bilingual children.*

In 2020, we were part of a small cohort of English learner (EL) researchers and educators from across the nation who shared a growing concern about the rising emphasis on the 'Science of Reading'. This trend had gained momentum nationwide in response to what was termed a 'literacy crisis'.

We observed a resurgence in the adoption of two-decades-old research on reading instruction, overlooking the evidence base related to English learners and bilingual development. The prevailing narrative championed narrow reading approaches that predominantly or exclusively focused on foundational reading skills and phonics as the purported solution.

Missing was the comprehensive set of elements we knew were essential in literacy development and which we recognized as vital for second language learners. And nowhere in these discussions were goals of biliteracy addressed, nor were processes of dual language literacy development considered. Additionally, the extensive research conducted over the past two decades on reading and writing for culturally and linguistically diverse students was noticeably absent. It was in response to these gaps that we came together to establish the National Committee for Effective Literacy (NCEL).

While the media persisted in viewing the disparate voices as a revival of a longstanding 'reading war' (phonics vs whole language), our voices were more focused on advocating for the incorporation of second language learner considerations in the newly emerging demand for reading materials, strategies, teacher preparation and professional development. We sought to bring the field up to speed with the latest research on second language development, understanding the important relationship between oral language and literacy, recognising the significance of background knowledge, appreciating the advantages of biliteracy, and promoting cross-language connections in literacy education for English learners.

Fast forward two years, and we contributed to and signed a Joint Statement in collaboration with The Reading League, the premier Science of Reading organisation. Our support for this statement arose through two years of extensive dialogue and shared concern about the increasing use of 'science of reading' as 'a buzzword and a lightning rod' in the greater field of education. Our team of EL/bilingual researchers collaborated

closely with researchers from The Reading League, delving into research to collectively offer united and cohesive guidance to the field on reading instruction and literacy development for EL students. The Joint Statement sought to unite a community of experts around a comprehensive body of knowledge impacting literacy development, and to clarify that many practices labelled as SOR do not align with scientific evidence for ELs. The agreement within the Joint Statement highlights the principles of effective evidence-based reading instruction and the need for a comprehensive approach for multilingual learners (MLLs).

One of our primary objectives was to dispel a prevalent misconception surrounding the science of reading, specifically challenging the widespread belief that it exclusively focuses on foundational reading skills.

A key breakthrough embedded in the Joint Statement is the repositioning of foundational reading skills – such as phonics, word recognition, and phonemic awareness – as components within a comprehensive literacy approach for MLLs. A comprehensive program, as defined in the statement, goes beyond foundational skills and includes language development, the development of content knowledge, vocabulary, effective expression, meaning making and explicit, systematic instruction in foundational skills essential for decoding and encoding.

The statement highlights the importance of oral language development and dedicated time for English Language Development (ELD). Additionally, for our multilingual students, this comprehensive literacy approach emphasizes leveraging the home language and fostering cross-language connections throughout the literacy development process, with the ultimate goal of achieving biliteracy. This kind of comprehensive literacy instruction recognizes the profound interconnections among knowledge, language, and literacy.

When asked if we support phonics instruction, our response is a resounding 'yes AND…'. Phonics is an important component of a comprehensive approach along with other critical interrelated elements of literacy development. Contrary to some misconceptions, phonics isn't the sole pathway to reading proficiency. Nor should it claim the spotlight as the primary component. Rather, it plays an essential role in early literacy, guiding students to make sense of letter-sound relationships and introducing them to the basic decoding/encoding principle that transforms language into print/text form.

Together with strong oral language development and vocabulary development, phonics serves as the mechanism for recognizing language and meaning in print form. However, its efficacy hinges on relationship to the other components. For English learners, mastering the sounds, phonemes/morphemes of English, building sufficient vocabulary in English as well as

learning how English works must accompany phonics instruction. These elements – language development, foundational skills, comprehension strategies, knowledge/content development, ESL/ELD, vocabulary development, and cross-language connections with home language – together, form the comprehensive literacy approach essential for multilingual learners to achieve literacy.

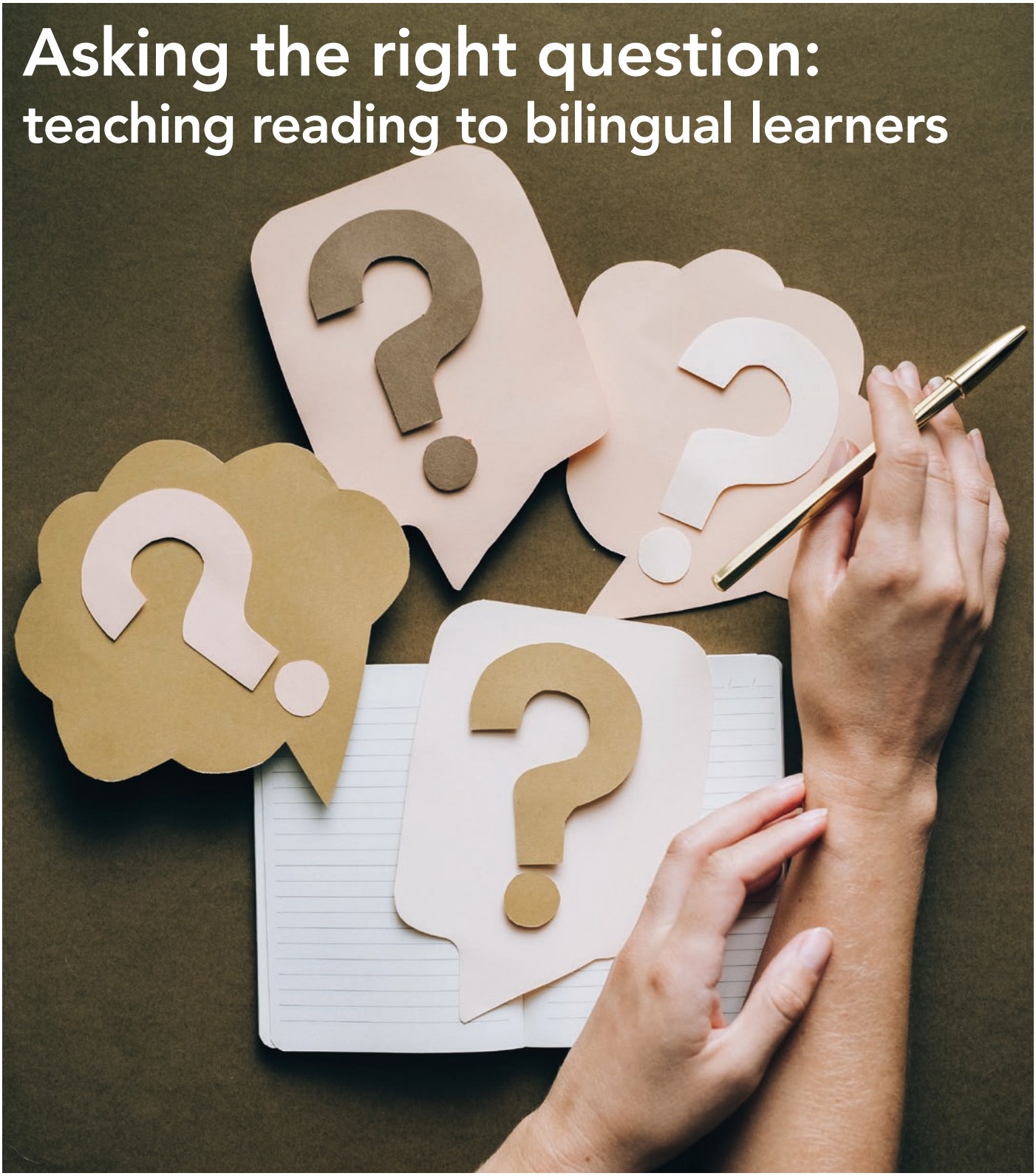
Finally, our students don't become readers and writers solely by acquiring literacy skills. They become readers and writers through recognizing and experiencing the purposes of reading and writing. It's in this realization of the power of reading and writing for learning, information, voice and entertainment that true literacy blossoms. Achieving this revelation involves frequent access to and active engagement with materials that reflect student's own lives and communities while offering glimpses into a broader world. It's about seeing their identity within literacy: 'People like me are in books. People like me are writers. This is a tool for me.' Comprehensive literacy instruction couples a skills-focused approach to the mechanics of reading and writing with an emphasis on fostering engagement and shaping robust literacy identities.

The Joint Statement, while a significant achievement, is a partial step, leaving room for future dialogues to address additional key issues related to socio-cultural aspects of literacy development, biliteracy pedagogy, print access and opportunity, literacy identity, and the impact of language status on literacy development. The collaboration between The Reading League and the National Committee for Effective Literacy has produced an important tool for educators and advocates by outlining the principles of evidence-based reading instruction and calling for a comprehensive and interconnected approach to literacy development. As the education landscape continues to evolve, may the Joint Statement help guide practitioners towards literacy education that embraces multilingual learners.

Martha Hernández, *the Executive Director for Californians Together, leads a coalition that advocates for the educational success of California's 1.1 million English learners. Martha's current focus involves the expansion of biliteracy programs, implementing the California English Learner Roadmap, the state's English learner policy, and spearheading the National Committee for Effective Literacy to promote effective literacy for emergent bilingual and English learner students.*

Laurie Olsen, *Ph.D., is the founding Director of SEAL, a P-5 model of English learner centered language and literacy education. Dr. Olsen has published dozens of books, videos and articles on English Learner and Dual Language education, and has spent the last five decades researching, writing, and providing leadership development and technical assistance on educational equity with an emphasis on English learner and dual language education.*

Asking the right question:
teaching reading to bilingual learners



*Phonics has, and continues to be, be a point of contention for many in the field of ELT. Professors **Ester de Jong** and **Socorro Herrera** discuss how to contextualise phonics instruction for bilingual learners.*

In an early response to the science of reading movement in the United States, the National Committee for Effective Literacy (NCEL) noted that the body of research included in the science of reading is derived from the cognitive sciences (neuroscience, linguistics, psychology) and is largely based on research on native English speakers learning to read in their home language. Literacy development, the report argued, includes discrete reading skills – phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, comprehension – but notes that these will not be sufficient until they are also embedded within our understanding of the social and cultural elements connected to student learning.

Caution is needed to ensure that recommendations from native speaker studies are not uncritically extrapolated to what works for students learning to read in English as an additional language. A recent joint statement by the Reading League and NCEL underscores the importance of explicitly addressing English learners (ELs) when considering implications for policy and practice. Educators and policy makers must ask what we know about teaching reading to ELs based on studies that have been designed to specifically examine how ELs learn to read in English as an additional language. We can then talk in an informed way about what practices work for ELs/EBs and to what extent these align with and/or diverge from what we do for native English speakers.

Teaching phonics is one such area that warrants additional consideration. The question is not 'should phonics be taught or not?' for ELs. Given English orthography, there is no question that phonics is an important component of reading for native English speakers and ELs alike. A better question is: What conditions are necessary for phonics instruction to be effective for ELs? Processes that lead to fluent reading comprehension in a given language rely upon:

- The learner's oral comprehension of the target language for multiple purposes.
- The learner's exercise of literacy skills that allows for a seamless transition from decoding of print to making meaning.
- The teacher's ability to contextualize instruction.

Building a strong oral language foundation

Native English speakers begin school with basic grammar, commonly used vocabulary, and receptive oral language skills. Phonics instruction designed for this group of students rightly takes this foundational oral proficiency and uses it to make sound-letter connections. When children come to school speaking a native language other than English, they also have these skills, but in their home language and varying abilities in English. They need to continually develop an oral language base – including listening comprehension – in English while applying the processes necessary for reading to existing language assets. Research on second language development has consistently emphasized the importance of oracy development. Effective classroom strategies that promote oracy include:

- **Promoting contextualized, language rich interaction opportunities.** The learner needs to be invited to use their full linguistic repertoire, such as through instructional conversations.
- **Incorporating students' ability to hear and identify sounds in meaningful words.** Phonics should be directly tied to the words that children use daily. These may come from interactions with community and family members or from other experiences, such as television, peers or video games.

Understanding the influence of L1

Communication, comprehension, and expression are deeply bound by the learners' first language(s) as they enter the second language for literacy/reading. Instructional practices that are pivotal for effective literacy development with ELs include:

- **Using words that ELs comprehend and know from their own experience.** Students may **perceive sounds differently based upon the phonologic patterns in the first learned language**. For example, CVC words are very common in English, but rare in languages where more words end on vowel sounds. Furthermore, those vowels carry significant morphological meaning related to gender, tense and so on. Final consonants factor less in many languages than they do in English where the last bit of sound must be correctly perceived to distinguish words. When phonics instruction focuses on final consonant clusters, it is important to use words chosen from learners' own experience where the perception of the final consonant changes the meaning of a relevant message. Merely drilling from prescribed lists of English words is unlikely to facilitate understanding and, as a result, fails to achieve the intended outcome.
- **Recognising and respecting variation in oral language.** Linguistically, vowel and consonant sounds are influenced by mouth shape and placements and vary by surrounding sounds. The first sound in 'door' is usually spoken differently than the sounds represented by 'd' in words like 'drain' and 'walked', with the latter sounding more like 't'. Socio-linguistically, native English speakers reflect tremendous variation in their pronunciation of these same words. For ELs, their pronunciation is also shaped by their home language(s). Given the variance for native English speakers, imagine the challenges speakers of other languages encounter when 'rules' of spelling and mouth formation do not match the language they see and hear spoken among native English speakers. Our linguistic and lived experiences influence sound perception in ways that either promote or hinder the synergy of literacy processes required to read.

Contextualized instruction

Phonics is part of the process that leads toward the real goal of reading; namely, comprehension. As we engage in phonics instruction, it is imperative not to lose the forest for the trees. A critical strategy to support the comprehension of ELs is:

- **Embedding phonics instruction in meaningful content that is comprehensible.** Comprehension is not a static system. Context and familiarity also shape what we hear. The automaticity with which students hear sounds and sound strings as units of meaning (words) and then associate those representations with print symbols is highly dependent upon the use of materials/stimuli which equitably allow learners to access meaning. Literacy skill practices that fail to prioritise meaning instead relegate decoding and fluency to word calling. Such practices later compel remedial measures that detract from students' learning of content. When phonics is devoid of meaning and simply becomes memorisation and word calling, it neither advances fluency nor builds comprehension.

A prerequisite condition for the effective literacy practices described are teachers' dispositions toward ELs and what they bring to school. None of these strategies will matter if the teacher views ELs with a mindset that says: this student cannot speak English fluently, has a vocabulary gap, does not have the right background knowledge and so on. The strategies presented here are premised on the understanding that ELs bring rich cultural and linguistic experiences to the learning task, though these experiences are likely different than those of mainstream English speakers. When enacting effective instruction, teachers recognize these experiences as resources for learning and begin there—valuing who the student is and what they bring.

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Top grades for graded readers!

*Some are turning their nose up at graded readers, but teachers **Willy Renandya** and **George Jacobs** argue that the books are a valuable tool to improve the reading skill.*

As language educators, we constantly seek effective ways to support and enhance our students' language learning experiences. One powerful yet often neglected strategy is the use of graded readers.

Graded readers are widely acknowledged to be highly beneficial for many areas of language proficiency. They are specially written or revised reading materials tailored for various proficiency levels and designed to meet the varied interests of our students. Students can experience the joy of reading a fiction or non-fiction graded reader on practically any topics that pique their interest at any proficiency level. Graded readers provide beginning students with an excellent bridge to gradually move to reading non-graded, unabridged texts.

Here are some of the key language learning benefits of graded readers:

1. Immersive language learning

In the classroom setting, teachers typically use short and linguistically difficult passages to introduce new language items and to teach comprehension skills. This is a good thing, but there are two problems here: firstly, the reading passages are often hard to comprehend and the quantity is hardly sufficient to activate students' internal language learning mechanism; secondly, the contents of the reading materials may not always be of interest to the students, thus doing little in boosting their motivation to read more in the target language.

Research shows that to learn a new language well, students need to read a lot and often. Graded readers can serve as an excellent means for beginning students to be joyfully immersed in interesting and meaningful language.

2. Building confidence and a love for reading

Students often find classroom reading materials too challenging and uninspiring. While a small minority of the students may manage to handle demanding texts, others might disengage and develop negative feelings about reading. The fear of reading is particularly prevalent among beginning readers, potentially depriving them of the opportunity to experience the benefits of the cycle of growth in reading.

The cycle of growth begins when they pick up a graded reader, find it to be comprehensible and enjoyable; they then pick up another reader and read it with greater confidence and enthusiasm. The cycle of growth can be contrasted with the cycle of stagnation that beginning readers often experience: they pick up a book, find it hard to read, so they read slowly and laboriously with little understanding. As a result, their reading ability becomes stagnant or may even decline.

3. Contextualized learning of vocabulary and grammar

The classroom is an excellent place to introduce important language features to beginning learners of English. Indeed, vocabulary and grammar can be systematically taught and practiced, providing beginning students with a good foundation of the workings of the target language. But the classroom may not be the best place for students to experience the full range of contexts in which new words and grammar points are used. For example, to fully understand the full range of meanings of a simple word such as 'good', students need to see how it is used in a variety of contexts, such as the below examples from the Cambridge Learners' Dictionary:

- Have you read any ***good*** novels lately? (Interesting, enjoyable)
- She speaks ***good*** French. (Of a high quality or level)
- When would be a ***good*** time to call you. (Suitable)
- A holiday will do you ***good***. (To be useful or helpful)
- ***Good*** heavens! It's already 11 p.m. (Used to express surprise)
- When he was 20, he left home for ***good***. (Forever)

Graded readers provide meaningful and rich contexts where students can experience words and grammatical structures in captivating stories rather than discreet vocabulary lists and grammar rules. This contextualized learning not only improves comprehension but also helps students appreciate the varied meanings and usages of vocabulary and grammar. Multiple exposure to language features in meaningful contexts is believed to

propel language acquisition, allowing students to apply their knowledge to authentic language use outside the classroom.

4. But graded readers are boring and inauthentic!

One of the misconceptions in ELT has to do with the notion of authenticity. Authentic materials are those written by and intended for native speakers and other high proficiency users of the language. The thinking goes like this: since the goal of language learning is to enable the use of English in authentic situations in the real world, students should be exposed to this kind of language as early as possible. Graded readers are not authentic as they are written in simple language and the intended audience are language learners, not native speakers. Therefore, readers should not be used as they would derail students' language learning process.

On the surface, this makes a lot of sense. However, research and experience tell us that authentic language may not be suitable for beginning language learners; the language is often far too challenging and the contents not very relatable. ELT scholars believe that when the input materials are not comprehensible language learning may not proceed smoothly.

Graded readers have faced considerable criticisms, especially for their earlier versions which contained simplistic and bland language. Many of these titles were adapted 19th or 20th century classics such as 'Pride and Prejudice' and 'A Tale of Two Cities'. However, modern graded readers today are written in a simple and interesting style, covering a wider range of titles, including movie tie-ins, non-fiction and fiction.

There are, of course, highly interesting and readable authentic materials that teachers can and should continue to use. But the majority may not be suitable for our novice students. We should therefore consider incorporating graded readers in our teaching, using materials that are freely available on the internet, such as the Extensive Reading Foundation or British Council Story Zone. There are also those that require subscription, such as XReading, a virtual library with nearly two thousand graded readers, including audio narrations and comprehension quizzes. XReading is supported by an easy-to-use learner management system that can be seamlessly integrated into our existing reading programmes, allowing teachers to assign titles, monitor student reading progress and check comprehension.

It's clear graded readers are powerful resources for language educators, particularly when working with beginning level students. These books help address the unique challenges of novice learners, thereby contributing to their vocabulary growth, reading confidence, and overall language proficiency. As practicing teachers, it is our duty to recognize the huge language learning benefits of graded readers and incorporate them into our teaching methodologies. In doing so, we not only enhance the language learning experience of our students but also lay the foundation for a lifelong love of reading.

Useful Resources on graded readers and extensive reading

1. Free graded readers: https://erfoundation.org/wordpress/graded-readers/; https://www.letsreadasia.org/
2. Academic resources on extensive reading: https://erfoundation.org/wordpress/bibliography/
3. Academic paper on the theory and practice of extensive reading: https://willyrenandya.com/the-primacy-of-extensive-reading-and-listening/

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Any language you want?

Knowing the best way to learn English can be a challenge for all our students. However, fellow learner, ***Fabio Cerpelloni's*** *'language autobiography' might – or might not! – just have the answers they're looking for…*

What's the best way to learn another language?

In 'Any Language You Want: 18 Conflicting Lessons for a New Kind of Language Learner', I answer this question 18 times. But I don't do it by discussing teaching or learning methodologies; this isn't an academic book. No big names in ELT are cited, no Second Language Acquisition research is mentioned. 'Any Language You Want' is a collection of my own personal stories and experiences of learning English, my second language.

In each chapter, I talk about the problems, beliefs, thoughts, and frustrations I had as a learner, and share the strategies I adopted to improve my language skills. I then advise that if you want to learn a second language, you should do exactly what I did.

The final sentence of each story is always the same: 'This is how to learn a language.' Strong. Assertive. Prescriptive. Each story talks about the best learning method. But there's a twist: each story disagrees with the next.

For example, in the first chapter, *Invest in a New Life and Language Classes*, I argue that taking a course is essential. After all, that is what I did when I was learning English in London:

> 'I spent £600, as much as I earned in three weeks, and enrolled in a six-month English course. I worked during the day and studied in the evening for three hours twice a week with a group of people from all over the world. I learned grammatical points I had never studied before. I practiced writing for the first time and got useful feedback from my teachers. I had my mistakes corrected and realized that if you say "You can't" without pronouncing the verb "can't" with a long vowel sound, you are actually throwing the worst possible insult in the English language. I found out that some other things I had been saying were also incorrect.
>
> 'Invest in a new life. Invest in language classes. This is how to learn a language.' **- p.6**

In the next story, however, I argue against taking courses and moving abroad, persuading readers to learn independently in their own country. *Walk Alone, No Investment Needed* starts like this:

> 'In 2013, a few days after I landed in Adelaide, Australia, I inquired about a job vacancy advertised at the reception of the hostel where I was staying. The ad was about a position as a waiter in a resort. When I asked the owner of the hostel for more information, he picked up the phone and called the manager of the resort saying that there was an Italian guy interested in the job.
>
> '"Can he speak English?" the manager asked.
>
> '"Yes, he can hold a conversation with me quite well. I'd give him a seven out of 10."
>
> 'Although I still made mistakes and didn't have a huge vocabulary, I was pleased to hear that my English was level seven to the ears of a native speaker.
>
> 'Two years later, in 2015, I left Australia and moved to Auckland, New Zealand. I wanted to do an English proficiency course and get the C2 certificate, a piece of paper that would show I had mastered English to an exceptional level: Level 10. I had to take an entry test to enrol in this course. The minimum level required was C1+, or Level 9, if you prefer. I took the test and passed it. In two years, from 2013 to 2015, my English went from Level 7 to Level 9. How did I make such a great improvement?' **- pp.7, 8**

It goes on to explain what types of self-studying and practice activities I did, ending conclusively:

'Walk alone and never leave your country. This is how to learn a language.'

So, which story tells the truth? Which one is right? Neither and both. I didn't write these stories to prescribe a method. I wrote them to share what worked for me as a language learner, hoping to empower, inspire, and motivate others. I also wrote them to take a stance against popular marketing campaigns that promote 'the best method' or 'the secrets' to language learning. All the eighteen stories are here to help students understand the messy, no one-size-fits-all nature of language acquisition so they might find clarity on what can work for *them*.

These days, students are often exposed to a lot of tips, advice, and 'best methods'. But I don't think learners need more information and tips; it's crucial for them to question every piece of advice they hear or read.

For instance, some YouTube teachers often say: 'Don't worry about studying grammar. Use the language instead! Have conversations!' This is good advice; I've given it many times to my learners too. But is this good advice for *everyone*? I don't think so. For my partner, this would definitely be the worst tip; she's an advanced speaker of English who has focused on communication her entire English learning life. Yet she complains that she makes grammar mistakes but doesn't know how to correct them. Should she 'forget about grammar and have more conversations'? Maybe not. In fact, I argue the opposite of that would be more useful to her.

For learners, every piece of advice is a specific tool to solve a specific problem. 'Any Language You Want' acts as a menu, giving options that students can pick and implement. Although it is not a textbook, the book can be used in class as a graded reader as well as a springboard for discussion. My adult A2 learners read it independently and a colleague emailed me to say she's been using it with her advanced classes; she puts her students in groups to read and discuss the stories, and told me 'It's so interesting to hear their ideas and beliefs about language learning'.

'I have long been a connoisseur of the "stories" of highly successful language learners,' said renowned linguist, teacher trainer and author, Scott Thornbury. 'So I was keen to hear Fabio's own account. Even more so when I discovered how closely we align on the issue of prescriptivism: I have always argued that there is no one "best method" for learning a second language, and Fabio draws the same conclusion from out of the multiple strands of his own very readable and insightful "language autobiography".'

So, if you find your values align with Scott's, 'Any Language You Want' may be a valuable addition in your classroom, or a book to recommend to your learners.

Fabio Cerpelloni *is an English language teacher, freelance writer, author, and podcaster from Italy. Learning English became such a great passion for him that he ended up teaching it professionally in New Zealand, Spain, Ireland, and Italy, his native country. You can find out more about Fabio and his work on his website – www.fabiocerpelloni.com*

Any Language You Want

18 Conflicting Lessons for a New Kind of Language Learner

Fabio Cerpelloni

From Teacher to Teacher Leader
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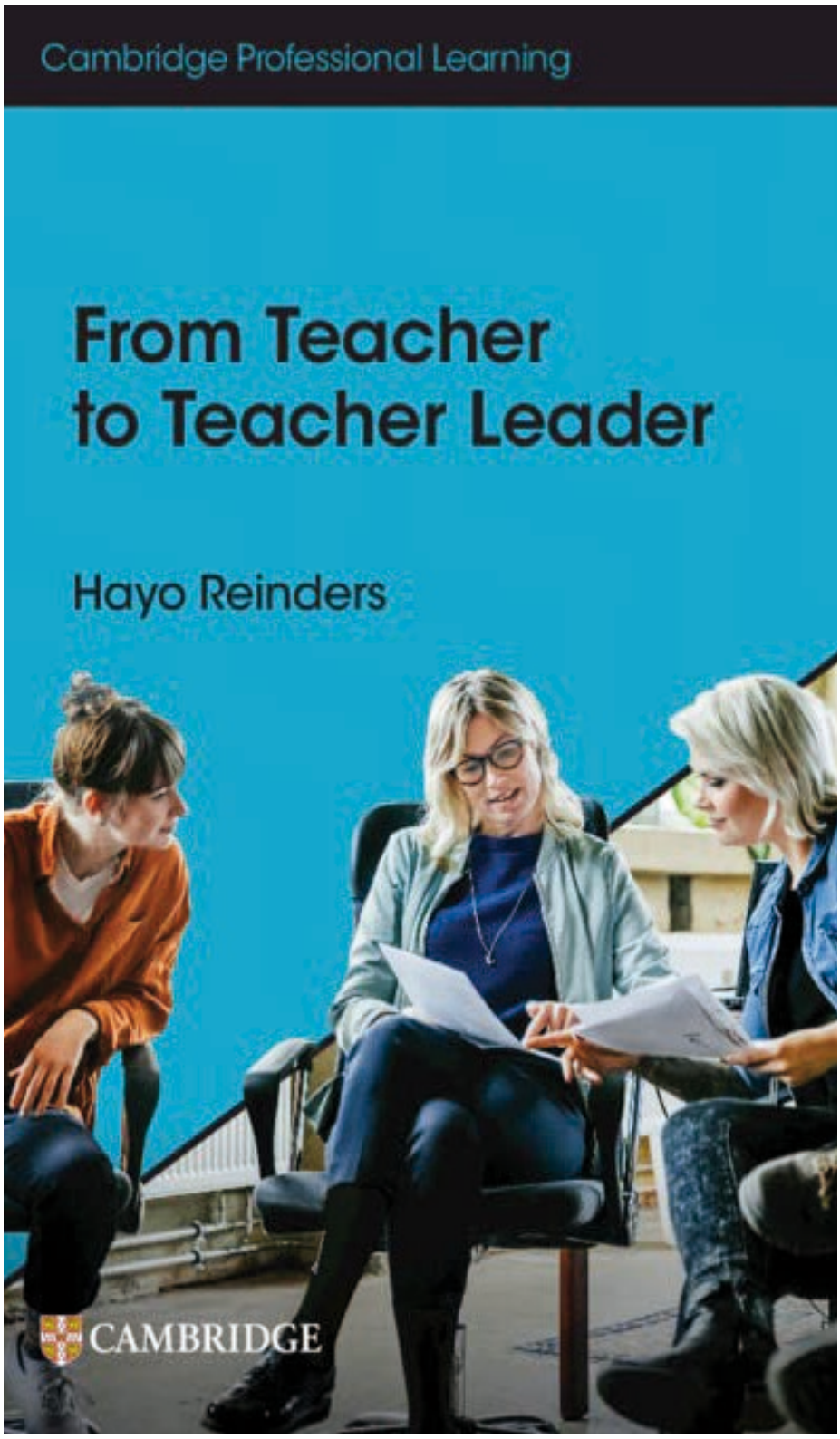

Too often, perhaps, language teaching professionals are reluctant to take on additional responsibilities in their own (or other) institutions since they feel it will involve extra administration and supervision. However, although leadership and management are often related and may appear on a continuum, the term 'leader' in this title does not refer to what we would normally consider management. As chapter one outlines, if you are mentoring, sharing materials, involved in action research or simply motivating colleagues, then that is what the author would describe as leadership; more specifically, this involves what he terms 'leading from behind the scenes', perhaps at a lower, but equally important, place.

Part One of this title looks at personal leadership; firstly getting to know yourself as a leader. Curiously – and I was left wondering at its relevance – it then looks into supporting student leadership. But by far the most useful chapter in this part (and perhaps the whole book) is that on leadership through research. Here, the author describes the value and potential benefits of research, then provides a concise explanation of the differences between two main types, action research and exploratory practice. Related to the latter is an approach that was new to me: appreciative inquiry. Other very helpful sections in this chapter cover sharing research insights gained with colleagues, plus co-researching.

Part Two concerns community leadership, and looks at building supportive communities by making a language teaching department more inclusive and accommodating by means of networking, cooperation, collaboration and partnerships. Throughout each chapter, sections appear on common concerns, such as whether or not to invite the manager to the safe space created where teachers can voice their real opinions. My own opinion is they should not.

Each chapter ends with the outline of a personal project for potential leaders-from-behind to engage in. Resistance and conflict are certain to appear when innovation is on the horizon, and the author provides valuable pointers for dealing with both, such as having what he terms critical, fierce and courageous conversations. It's always good to see teacher wellbeing highlighted, and although techniques for enhancing wellbeing are listed on page 98 of the book, we are reminded that teachers do not burn out; chaotic institutions and systems cause this to happen.

The final part, on professional leadership, veers away from the notion of leadership as described above and opens with a rather theoretical chapter on understanding the organisation we might be involved with. For leadership to run smoothly, it's vital we are aware of the stakeholders involved; these are individuals, groups and organisations affected by project development. Communicating with stakeholders and how to gain approval from those such as the Director of the institution's language centre and IT support are explained in detail.

The final two chapters are devoted to fostering innovation and attaining sustainable education, both of which are largely theoretical. Language teaching professionals likely to benefit the most from this title will be those wishing to put into practice with others in their institution their skills and knowledge acquired on recently completed DELTA or Master's courses, although I would recommend selective reading of the chapters.

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