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Contents

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Phil was awarded an MBE in the 2017 Queen's New Year Honours for his work in special educational needs, equality, diversity and inclusion, and more recently he has retrained in counselling and bereavement counselling.

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About *The Pilgrims Teacher Trainer Journal*

The Pilgrims Teacher Trainer is a practical journal for those involved in English and modern language teacher training, teaching and training subjects through the medium of English, and teaching and training in wider education fields. Whether you are a teacher who tends to be asked questions by others in the staff room, a director of studies/head of department, a mentor or supervisor, an inspector going out to schools or a teacher educator at a university or you do all this online or in blended/hybrid ways – which is most likely today – this journal is for you.

Our aim is to provide a forum for ideas, information and news, to encourage collaboration and innovation between professionals, to understand how trainers in other fields operate and to continually learn from each other.

I am very pleased to welcome you to the 2024 winter edition of *The Pilgrims Teacher Trainer Journal.* I am aware, though, as you read this, that so many of you are going through extremely difficult times and situations; whether this is war, climate change, economic and political difficulties, and more. While there are unfortunately so many conflicts today the editorial team at the Pilgrims Teacher Trainer Journal consider it important that we have contributions giving space to teacher educators representing voices from the Hands Up Project in Gaza and from the perspective of teacher educators in Israel. These contributions, we hope, will promote understanding and compassion within an educational focus and show how education can be that place of caring compassion and hope where we can make a difference.

We also hope that the approaches in supporting learning may be of support for teacher educators working in different conflict zones – though, of course, different solutions will be likely in different contexts.

The Pilgrims Teacher Trainer Journal is open to everyone and in such difficult situations the development of professional learning communities is even more relevant and important. Pilgrims will never avoid difficult conversations. If this journal can contribute even in some small way to our understanding and support for each other, then this can hopefully be positive. The views expressed in all contributions to the journal are those of the writers – as we open up the journal to varied voices and views – these views are not necessarily representative of editorial policy of the Pilgrims Teacher Training Journal.

As always, in this issue we have a strong international representation in the journal from Austria, Canada, Egypt, Israel, Italy, Japan, Nepal, UK, USA and of course reflecting a voice of teacher educators in Gaza via the Hands Up project continuing our very rich, diverse content for you.

Our interview this month is with Varinder Ünlü who, with her rich professional and personal experience of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), does not hide from difficult questions on where we are in terms of "myths and realities" in applying and implementing approaches to EDI.

In this issue, we continue with our 'from the archive' section revisiting an article originally published in Volume 30 no. 3 on "Do you believe in 'neuromyths'?" by Carol Lethaby, USA and Patricia Harries, Canada. While there has been much discussion and evidenced-informed research on the concept of learning styles and other approaches which may be strongly contested, many myths about learning are still very prevalent. While nobody will argue that a variety of approaches in learning is effective, it's important we continue to highlight our need to ensure we are evidence informed in what we do.

Our cooperation with the British Council Teacher Educator network continues reaching a global audience with the journal, through the British Council Teacher Educator Newsletter. I am also pleased to announce that Pilgrims Teacher Training is advertising a full programme of one week courses this summer in the beautiful city of Segovia in Spain. The advert for the courses can be found towards the back of the journal and also via the website Pilgrims Website Teacher Training Courses– Pilgrims English Language Courses. https://www.pilgrims.co.uk/teacher-training-courses/pilgrims-in-segovia If you have access to Erasmus funding (or indeed other sources of funding) please do explore the possibility of joining us.

We, of course, will welcome and feedback, comments and further articles on any of the contributions in the Pilgrims Teacher Trainer Journal

Correction

In the previous issue of the journal we unfortunately spelt one of our contributors' names wrongly – please note the correct spelling of the author's name Briony Beaven. Briony's biography was also not up to date, and you can find the correct version in her article in the summer issue of the journal in the article on "Learning and growing as a teacher educator" in Volume 36 no. 4 in the archive.

We hope you enjoy this edition of The Pilgrims Teacher Trainer Journal and our contribution to encouraging the best of good practice in teacher education. As mentioned above we would be delighted to receive any feedback on any of the articles which you can send to me at the email address below.

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Post-teaching feedback can be reversed

By Abeer Ali Okaz, Egypt

Introduction

Being a CELTA tutor for quite some years means interacting with a lot of different individuals, assessing their lessons, grading their assignments, sharing their stories and much more. But in this article, I will only focus on feedback sessions that take place after each assessed lesson. These sessions are full of listening, responding, arguing, questioning, crying, cheering, smiling, celebrating, winning and much more; that is a typical post teaching feedback (PTF) experience in any CELTA course (at least the ones I was part of). It was one CELTA back in 2020, the last one before the start of the pandemic, when the idea hit me to change how to set my feedback sessions. Then the pandemic confirmed my initial idea; for me the pandemic was a catalyst for change. It played a vital role in the change of people's behaviors, attitudes and feelings towards accepting things in general (Drake, 2022; Baharom, et al., 2020). I started jotting down some of the trainees' reactions and feelings during these sessions, and realized the importance of understanding who my trainees are before giving feedback. In the past, I used to give feedback by encouraging trainees to discuss their lessons in pairs, then reflect back in the group how they think the lesson went, highlighting the strengths and areas for improvement. This usually worked out as a successful method of giving feedback provided there was harmony between the group, acceptance of others and readiness to participate in the session. But feedback sessions are not that sugar coated. Sometimes, trainees observing the lessons were not willing to share their thoughts because most of the time they would either prefer giving a holistic statement such as "what a wonderful/ good lesson," or starting with the action points such as "you should not do so and should have done". One course after the other, I started feeling that continuing to persuade the trainees to be more detailed and objective, and to use the peer observation sheets as their guidelines were sometimes in vain. Not feeling good after some of my feedback sessions and sensing some demotivation and dissatisfaction from my trainees, I had to sit and reflect back on the whole process. I asked myself what the aim and importance of these sessions was. I also asked myself what feelings and emotions revolved in the trainees' heads as they were awaiting their feedback, as well as what emotions those observing other trainees' lessons had. For these reasons, I started trying out different approaches to giving post teaching feedback and monitored how responsive trainees became after each session. The result seemed to move more towards acceptance and positivity of the overall experience.

Background

Post-teaching feedback (PTF) is an integral part of assessing trainees in pre-service courses, and in particular, in the CELTA. Tutors sometimes face challenges during these sessions for different reasons. Different backgrounds and teaching experience as well as different motivation and conscious competences (Burch, 1970) shape how trainees react towards the PTF sessions. Trainees also vary in their ways of learning new knowledge (Kolb, 1984) and in their tolerance in accepting changes. Thus, a lot feel the course workload is overwhelming, if not daunting; thus, PTF sessions are considered an added pressure. Some trainees would rather have the grade and leave than spend time discussing the strengths and action points of the observed lesson. For them, some PTF sessions appear harsh and subjective; usually these feelings arise not only because the trainees are resistant to changing their teaching beliefs, but also because some tutors choose the same technique in every feedback session. Others leave these sessions with a feasible plan to work on their action points. That is why PTF sessions can end up either productive and constructive, or dominating and tutor led. This article focuses on attempting to answer these questions:

- What is the aim of these sessions and why are they important?
- How does everyone feel before, during and after these sessions? And what challenges are associated with these feelings?
- What roles do trainers play in these sessions?
- How can we make this process positive and productive?

What is the aim of these sessions and why are they important?

PTF sessions aim to reflect back on: the decisions taken during the lesson; what worked well; what can be improved. Decisions taken while teaching the lessons are an important indicator of the trainees' awareness of the students and the learning opportunities they aim to offer to their students (Clarke, 2020). These sessions reflect the trainees' participation, interaction and response to feedback. Feedback given in these sessions is important to take into consideration before teaching future lessons and later when going back to the real classroom. They help tutors follow up on the progress of the trainees. These sessions should help trainees become reflective practitioners (Marie, 2016). Trainees will become more self aware by questioning their lessons by asking: "What did I do in my lesson? How did I do it? What does my teaching mean for my students? Did my students learn what I expected them to learn? And how many learning opportunities were there for my students?" They are

important because the sessions are expected to be a learning process for all parties: teachers, observers and tutors. Everyone ends up learning after these sessions because each one comes with their own teaching experience. Even if the trainee is a novice and has never stood in a classroom, the tutor and trainees can learn survival tactics from that trainee teacher.

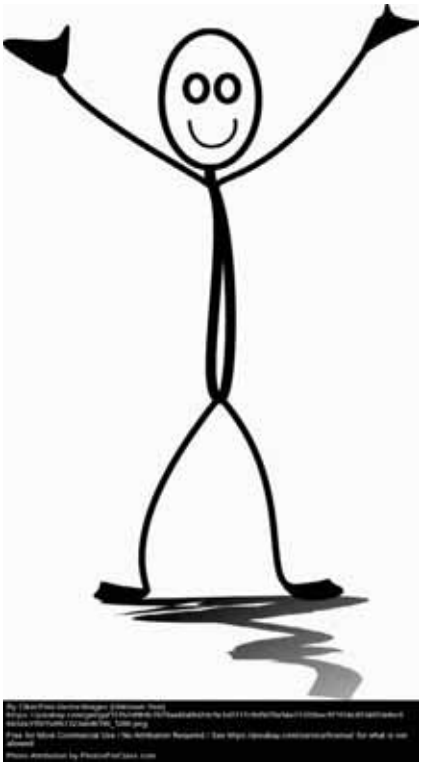
I am sure that there are zillion ways to give feedback to trainees after finishing their lesson, which is not the focus here. The article describes a personal experience that seemed to work better for my trainees. Personally, I used to set up the feedback sessions in ways to ensure the trainees went home with detailed feedback on every bit that took place during the lesson. These ways did not fail completely to help trainees progress in their future teaching, but there seemed to be something missing, which I tried and introduced. PTF sessions do not only involve teachers thinking about how much students have learned, but also about what needs to happen to help them learn more in coming lessons, a change that is highly recommended.

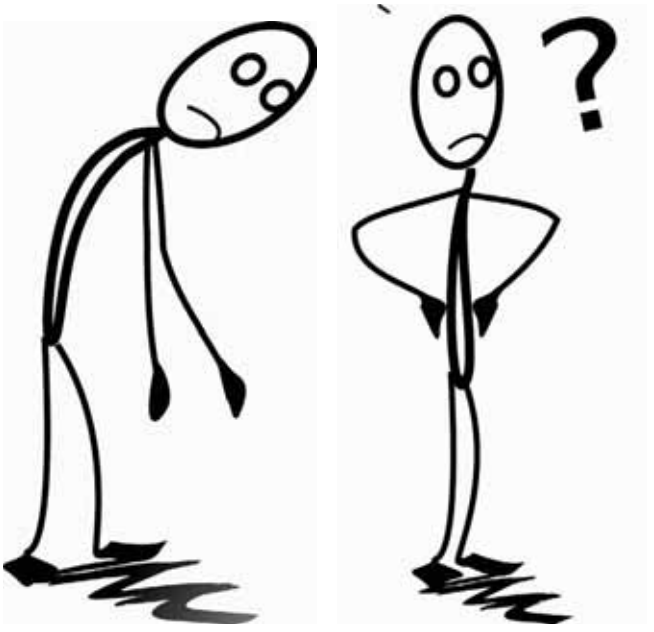
Feelings and emotions

We cannot deny that, besides aiming to develop the trainees and help them grow professionally, these feedback sessions are different in nature because they are followed by value judgment. Tutors are required to give a grade (to standard/not to standard) after each assessed session. The nature of such sessions develop certain undesired feelings which sometimes stop the productivity of the sessions (Richardson, n.d.).

Here are some illustrative examples showing how trainees feel after teaching/receiving feedback.

(Images by open clipart-vector r@ pixaby.com)





Guessing from the illustrations, some feel like “great, I am done”. Some may feel uncomfortable and vulnerable, less powerful, defensive and unmotivated. Some want to pick and go, others take feedback personally and feel the sessions are daunting or subjective. Being reflective is neither easy nor inherent. In fact, most humans have a tendency to avoid the deeper questions and to steer away from the feeling of unease that is caused by confrontation. Our self image and inner emotions shape how humans (trainees) approach problems and communicate together (Williams, Mercer and Ryan, 2015). We, as tutors, sometimes do not get these feelings and emotions as warning signals; we tend to forget how we, as ex-trainees, felt back then. If we stop and think about our first-class observations from our superior back in time, or about our first evaluation meeting, memories of worry and self image will come back.

What are some of the challenges?

Sometimes the question can be: “What is the trainee looking for from a PTF?” versus “What does a PTF session looks like?”

CELTA trainees get exposed to a massive flow of information and knowledge during CELTA courses that sometimes match the context they come from and sometimes not. So, besides these varied feelings and teaching context, there are usually other challenges,

especially if all trainees are monolingual and/or of the same nationality. These challenges arise because trainees come from different cultural and societal backgrounds, and they vary in their experiences, training and ways of learning (Dweck, 2006) even if they come from the same teaching context. First of all, trainees take the course for different reasons, not particularly for their own professional development. Some are being forced to take it to keep their existing jobs. Some respect the certificate and its value in the job market so they are eager to include one on their resume. Some really want to develop themselves professionally regardless of their intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. Trainees vary in their readiness to accept feedback and take in changes. The level of trust in tutors' expertise also differs from one trainee to the other. Last but not least, some trainees are not good listeners and are resistant to change. Humans in general prefer staying in their comfort zone even when they decide to take a step forward in their careers.

What roles do trainers play in these sessions?

The relationship between trainers and trainees would take another article to describe because it goes through a lot of phases, so I will only focus on the role of each. I think it is important that trainers ensure a balance between what the trainees need to hear during PTF sessions and what they can hear.

(Image by Mediamodifier@ pixaby.com)

In feedback sessions, trainees need to have a safe space to look back at what they did, why they did it and if what they did worked. Trainers can help identify where the trainees are located on the conscious competence learning model to prepare for how trainees will take in any feedback. Trainees need to be ready to think about how their lesson impacted learners and if they did the right things in class and which existing strategies they need to develop into new ones (Triple loop learning: Argyris and Schön, 1991). Trainers can also help trainees feel they are heard and that they have choices/alternative plans in their action points. Trainees come with their own experience, identity, years of training, own perceptions and influences from others. Thus, they are looking for assurance, trust and empathy. Trainers might want to be more understanding when evaluating the trainees' choices in class and allow room for justification (Mackenzie, 2012). They also do not need to feel that tutors are imposing their opinion/ passing judgment. The worst sessions would leave the trainees with feelings such as disappointment or anger because feedback was in the form of orders and criticism. Trainees look for confirmation that their preparation time is of value even if there are still areas to work on. It is always harsh to leave trainees feeling they are incapable of improving. Thus, it is important they feel safe and that their vulnerability is respected. All these interrelated roles help in the success of these sessions (Garside, 2020). Establishing a strong trusting relationship with trainees can promote effective learning (Williams, Mercer and Ryan, 2015). Encouraging trainees to take part in the decision-making process builds their self-confidence. Adapt the let's decide/try together approach as one way to shift the role of trainers from only deciding what should/should not be done to working hand-in-hand with the trainees.

(Photo by geralt@ pixaby.com)

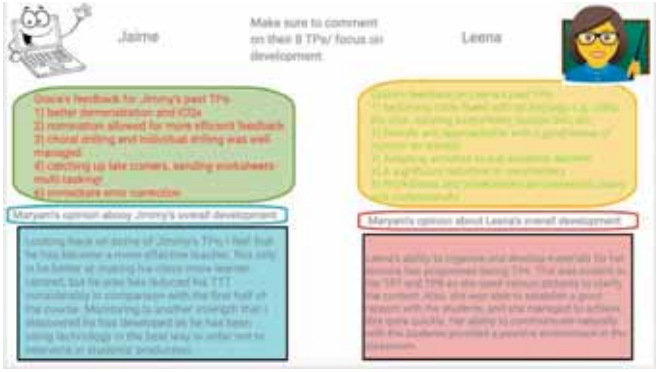
Five reflective methods in giving post teaching feedback

1 Padlets

For me, padlets are magic. They are free and user-friendly. Also, I created a padlet with the TP number and shared the link with my trainees. They would take it from there because it was a safe place for them to share their reflections on each other's work. Sometimes, they would not sign in using their email so the feedback would be anonymous. One rule we set together before starting that reflective habit is to respect each other and focus on the students and the learning outcomes rather than criticizing each other.

2 Jamboards

A visually attractive tool to give feedback to each other. It is a shame Google has decided to close it down in October 2024. One advantage is that trainees can reflect in any way they want if they do not want to type their reflection. Jamboards are digital boards that promote collaboration on a shared space; they are free and easy to use when giving peer feedback. Trainees can add annotations, emojis, visuals, part of a song/movie, arrows, sticky notes and more. Whatever trainees write on jamboards becomes accessible to others; it is simple and user-friendly. Jamboards offer a variety of options like a laser pointer, different pen styles and customized shapes. Also, using jamboards enables trainees to go back to edit or add more feedback so towards the end of the course, each trainee can see how they have developed over the course. For more jamboards, click here.



3 Drawings

The closest to my heart: I first got introduced to the idea of visual mind mapping in one of the Eaquals conferences when one of the speakers showed the work of Jade Blue, a teacher and researcher whose research interests focus on learner-generated visuals in ELT. I then felt this could be adapted for the purpose of feedback. I introduce it towards the end when trainees have started to get to know each other better. I would bring colours and A3 papers, and ask trainees to start drawing their reflection on their team's lessons. There is no pressure whatsoever if someone does not know how to draw because the whole idea is to draw a representation of the progress the other trainees have made over the past six or seven TPs. It can be an ice cream cone with several scoops showing the progress made or a before and after image. Another alternative to drawing would still be using colours to give hand feedback (see here). This has proven to be the most effective because trainees brought out the best they have when reflecting back on their team members. Usually, they would focus on how the trainee developed his/her relationship with the students, how the lessons have changed to be more student-focused and how they are more natural teaching, and much more. The fun of using colours and drawing while observing brought a lot of laughter and acceptance (video) to the feedback sessions. Click here to see samples.

4 Google Docs

The is a similar tool like to the padlet except that the latter is more visually easy to follow because some trainees prefer to see things in small boxes rather than in a run on commentary. If the trainee does not sign in with his/her Google account, then the feedback would also be anonymous.

5 Flipgrid

I used this during the pandemic and/or blackouts because sometimes when there is no internet or someone is feeling unwell, it is challenging to bring all trainees together at the same time. Flipgrid helped trainees to record their feedback and send it to all the team then trainees would have a chance to record back at their convenience.

How did the experiment turn out?

I did surveys on whether trainees were comfortable giving/receiving feedback in that manner and most of these showed much better attitudes towards feedback. They described that varying feedback techniques was useful and meaningful to them because the sessions:

1. included enough evidence they can refer back to when planning new lessons;
2. were varied and constructive as they promoted scaffolding (Bruner, 1950) and thus resulting in a positive learning experience;
3. included a humanistic dialogue seeing them as individuals and making feedback more personalized and directed (Wallis and Bednárová, n.d.);
4. established trusting relationships showing approval and understanding to build rapport, and using hedging strategies (Gakonga, 2021) to make feedback softer (when needed);
5. focused on progress and actionable feedback;
6. referred to emergent decisions (versus agreed on plan) and thus prioritizing feedback;
7. involved more peer feedback.

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Professional learning communities: A brief exploration of informal and formal learning in teaching

By Gary Robert, Japan

Introduction

This article explores the development of teacher expertise through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and examines how group reflection can support informal individual and group learning. Although individual reflection is powerful, the author argues that it is through the transformative power of collective reflection that potentially real change can occur, both individually and organisationally. Interactions within PLCs facilitate explicit teaching knowledge generation, foster a shared repository of practical theories, and encourage pedagogical innovation. The role of institutional support is crucial for their success. The article suggests that within the complex environment of any educational establishment, PLCs, supported by leadership, significantly contribute to both individual and organisational learning.

Background

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have the potential to foster collaborative learning and continuous improvement in educational settings. In the context of the university where I work, teachers meet each Friday to reflect on and discuss elements of their teaching and participate in specific training and development sessions. At the start of every meeting, teachers in small groups of two or three spend ten minutes reflecting and discussing their teaching. The groups are mixed up every week. The questions are quite general: asking teachers to discuss how they felt about the week, things that went well, things that didn't go so well, and any areas they could improve or want to share.

In this article, I would like to explore the theory behind PLCs and then discuss teachers' perceptions of group reflection. Understanding these experiences can help us improve the efficacy of PLCs in our institution and help others develop them in their specific setting. For this study, a short survey was sent out to the ten regular participants of the meeting. The survey aimed to gain insights into their general perceptions of group reflections, the impact they had, and how we might improve the process.

Complexity of Teaching

Teaching is a highly complex endeavour, with no stable knowledge (Schon, 2017). However, a core curriculum or pedagogic knowledge may be agreed upon by institutions and cascade down through set course materials, professional development sessions and formal observations that ensure adherence and ongoing support. Though these programmes can help to provide structured foundational knowledge, as well as more research-based practices, the range of knowledge needed to create a learning experience within a classroom is infinite and can never be fully understood or taught through such formal processes (Schon, 2017). Professional Learning Communities (PLC) can help supplement and enhance learning within any organisation (Wiliam, 2007).

Reflection

In dealing with the messy day-to-day activities of the classroom, teachers rely on a series of "scripts" or habits of the mind (Mezirow, 1993). These habits can come from information learnt whilst training, ongoing professional development, or more importantly, through day-to-day interactions in class and the educational institute. For Mezirow, "scripts" provide a framework for teachers, guiding their actions. Difficulties might arise if a teacher meets a problem that prevents them from achieving an intended outcome – a "critical incident" (Brookfield, 2017). When critically examined, these "critical incidents" can potentially lead to new insights and understandings.

Two primary forms of reflection aid this learning:

- **Reflection-in-action:** This involves adjusting teaching in class based on real-time feedback from students.
- **Reflection-on-action:** After the lesson, the teacher thinks back over the class, evaluating their actions and identifying potential areas of improvement.

As a result of reflection, both in and after the class, teacher knowledge potentially emerges. Between the teacher acting on the world using their "scripts" and the experience they have, there is the potential for new knowledge and understanding. In unexpected situations, teachers might draw upon their existing knowledge, making connections to create new understanding to address the situation. For example, a teacher notices students struggling in a group discussion. The teacher, reflecting-in-action, might decide to pause the lesson and conduct an impromptu workshop on effective discussion techniques. Or if the teacher was less sure of the specific skills needed, they might think back after the lesson, reflecting-on-action, and seek support from colleagues. This incident could lead to the development of new teaching materials focused on discussion skills, which could then be shared and used by colleagues, thereby supporting broader organisational learning. This adaptation, driven by the teacher's reflection on the classroom situation and students' needs, results in the development of new teaching strategies and materials. Knowledge and learning here emerge within the context of our classrooms – it is situated and context-dependent (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and can result in individual as well as organisational learning. No matter how effective institutional support or training is, this continual emergence of new knowledge from classrooms cannot always be predicted or delivered beforehand.

Professional learning communities

The power of collective reflection

Reflection, while powerful as an individual practice, the real transformative power and potential for innovation and change is within a community – a Professional Learning Community (PLC) (Wiliam, 2007). PLCs create an environment where teachers reflect collectively to support and share practice.

Addressing the implicit

Interactions within the group help to make implicit teacher knowledge more explicit. Teachers often act in a certain way without understanding why (implicit). This implicit knowledge is built up from their own classroom experiences or the surrounding institutional culture. The chance to articulate and critically examine certain behaviours enables implicit knowledge to become more explicit and reconceptualised as theory. These discussions foster general principles, concepts, or theories about teaching and learning which can add to a teacher's "scripts". This now explicit knowledge and experience can be shared and reapplied, enabling organisational learning.

Overcoming fears

Innovation and change, while vital, are often accompanied by apprehension and fear. It's easy for teachers to stay within their comfort zone, ignoring problematic areas of their teaching for fear of the unknown, or the possible loss of control. The collective space, however, potentially gives support – a safe space to share and explore experiences and knowledge. Teachers are more likely to try something new if they can see or hear other teachers' experiences that are directly related to their own.

Role of leadership

As highlighted above, reflection within PLCs has the potential to capture individual learning within the classroom and enable broader learning across the university as this knowledge is shared throughout the team. This learning is situated and context-dependent, something that conventional institutional training often cannot predict or provide. The success and effectiveness of PLCs rely significantly on institutional support. School leaders play a pivotal role in championing these communities, by providing the time, space and structure or guidance for teachers to work and learn collectively. While, in theory, creating the right conditions for PLCs has the potential to impact significantly on individual and institutional learning, as with any human process this is often not so straightforward, and there is a need by management to ensure the time and cost of such endeavours can be justified to meet the institutional needs. The subsequent section sheds some light on teachers' perspectives regarding the effectiveness of PLCs in our university setting. It offers some practical insights into how these meetings can be further developed to improve individual and institutional learning, particularly in creating a better link between the informal and formal aspects of learning within the university.

Results

The majority of teachers find the reflection sessions useful. They appreciate the opportunity to engage in open and honest dialogue about successes and challenges. These discussions enable a better insight into teaching and lesson planning. Specifically beneficial is hearing others' experiences and ideas, allowing teachers to recognise that the issues they face are not unique. This, in turn, helps foster a sense of camaraderie and mutual understanding, making discussions more comfortable and creating an openness to support and ideas from others. Hearing these ideas gives teachers more confidence to make changes to their lessons. Crucially, teachers felt that there was never an obligation to reveal anything they did not want to. One teacher mentioned that being conscious of the weekly meeting prompts them to engage in more thorough reflection and preparation ahead of each meeting, helping them to contribute more during the reflection discussion. However, at the same time, there was clear evidence that some more experienced teachers felt the reflection was minimally beneficial.

As well as gaining specific knowledge related to the teaching, most teachers felt it was a good chance to connect with people they wouldn't generally interact with much throughout the week. For some, particularly newer teachers, this was the only chance to talk to others in the week. Teachers felt the conversations were informal and laid back, allowing a more collegial atmosphere and a feeling that issues could be discussed without criticism.

The group reflections generally last about ten minutes. Most felt this was fine, while some noted it could easily go on longer. One teacher suggested that the discussion sessions should occur every two weeks instead of weekly, citing a lack of sufficient topics for a weekly conversation. One even speculated that some teachers deliberately arrived a little late to avoid participating, noting that reflections were not taken seriously and seen as a "warmer" for the main meeting.

Regarding the general structure of the reflections, one teacher felt that there was no real organisation, and it was more like a random chat than a structured discussion. However, others noted that teachers commonly spent time catching up with each other, engaging in small talk, before sharing their reflections. As a result, it was felt that some time should be allowed for a quick catch-up and then specific time allocated for reflection, to avoid the two parts blurring into each other.

The majority felt that the reflection questions were quite vague which in turn could lead to vague answers. Therefore, most felt that a few more targeted questions related to the week's lessons might help those struggling to answer the more general reflection questions. However, teachers felt it was still important to have general and open questions to allow the freedom to discuss what they want.

At the end of the group reflection, teachers are asked if they want to share anything with the whole group. One teacher felt that, though there was probably something

useful to share from each group, teachers rarely did, as there was an underlying pressure "to get on with the 'actual' meeting", i.e., the more formal training. One comment noted that some teachers become visibly annoyed when somebody volunteers information, particularly if it is seen as irrelevant to the whole group. A suggested solution is to capture the ideas across the groups by having a group scribe note anything pertinent on a shared Google Doc. However, it was felt that this may stop teachers from discussing what they wanted for fear of having it documented.

Reflecting on the results above, it is evident that the reflection sessions are generally well-received, providing valuable opportunities for open dialogue and peer learning. However, they may not benefit all, which can lead to a lack of engagement. This highlights the need for more structured and focused reflection practices. In the following section, I will discuss these findings, analysing how they align with the initial objectives of enhancing collaborative learning and teacher development within our institution. Finally, I will consider the broader implications of these insights for refining the approach to PLCs, ensuring they cater effectively to the varied needs of our teaching staff.

Discussion

Developing relations

It is clear that both the informal chats which teachers often engage in prior to the reflection and the reflection itself help to develop relations between the teachers. Teaching can be quite isolating, especially in a large university, where some teachers might not meet anyone throughout the week. This is especially pronounced post-COVID, where there is a tendency for teachers to plan at home or on their own rather than in the teachers' room, which most would have done pre-COVID. These quick chats can play a vital role in building relations and integrating newer teachers into the team. This in turn can help to develop a more positive environment at work and reduce isolation, and the potential for burnout. Teachers who feel connected and valued are more likely to be engaged and committed to their work (Owen, 2016).

Informal learning

Though we can say a community is important from the sense of wellbeing, it also has an impact on learning. Through developing relations there is more open and honest dialogue, knowing ideas or views will not be criticised, judged or evaluated. This culture of openness is transmitted to newer teachers who feel able to open up and be supported with classroom issues, quickly integrating them into the university's community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Less experienced teachers seem to benefit more from the weekly reflection, as potentially they lack the full range of "scripts" to enable them to deal with day-to-day teaching in this new context. This means they can face some challenges, some "critical incidents", which can be shared and discussed with others. In contrast, for more experienced teachers, the reflection seems less beneficial. They potentially have a fuller range of "scripts" which can help them deal with most aspects of teaching, meaning there are potentially fewer critical incidents. The general and "vague" nature of the reflection questions, as well as the limited time, may mean it is easy for teachers to skate over and miss a more critical examination of their teaching. Here, more focused questions could help shine a light on a variety of classroom aspects that are easy to avoid with these more cursory reflections. At the start and throughout each term, management observes all classes, both informally and formally. This data is usually used as the basis of more formal training amongst the team, though some aspects of this data could be used to help the teachers focus more critically on certain aspects of teaching and learning. Short case studies or scenarios from the observation data could be presented, enabling teachers the chance to reflect on specific aspects that might challenge and develop their understanding. This is particularly important for experienced teachers, who may not have noticeable issues but could benefit from alternative perspectives or a more nuanced analysis of the classroom. Another area is to potentially ask teachers to prepare ahead of time, as one teacher does, which could help to improve the quality of the discussions and foster broader reflection across the week.

Coaching / Mentoring Skills

Though experienced teachers feel they gain little from the reflection discussions, potentially having to articulate knowledge can help to trigger a more explicit understanding of implicit knowledge. At the time, this might not register as new learning, and possibly help to reinforce the idea that nothing new is being learnt – they are explicitly realising what they implicitly already knew. However, this new explicit understanding could make it easier for them to refine and improve their teaching strategies, enabling them to recognise what works best in a particular context, and thus make more informed decisions about their lessons and lesson planning. This could also help to develop their ability to mentor and train less experienced teachers, as they learn to explain their expertise in a structured and understandable manner. The potential development of these management or training skills could be communicated more clearly as a benefit, helping to gain buy-in from more experienced teachers who are possibly starting to feel more jaded by the reflection process. There could also be a more explicit link between these specific skills and the various management and training roles within the team, fostering opportunities for experienced teachers to take on more of these roles themselves, thus helping to develop the expertise more broadly within the team and across the university.

Sharing across the team

In the past, we have opened up group discussions to the whole team, eliciting and fostering dialogue among all the teachers around issues emerging from the various groups. As this is unplanned, we have no idea how long this might go on. There have been some discussions, that while engaging and potentially beneficial across the team, have taken up time that impacts the rest of the planned training. This appears to be evident to more experienced

teachers, who are wary of what they might see as less important issues eating into the agenda and pushing out or squeezing other areas. So, as a result, there can be pressure to not share and move quickly on. However, as mentioned, there are times when key aspects do come up that may have an impact on the whole team, so there should be a process to potentially capture and deal with these issues. We have experimented with trying to capture aspects on a shared document, but, as noted, this does potentially slow down the reflection process and add a more formal layer that could reduce the willingness to share and discuss issues freely. Potentially, here we need to set aside three to four minutes to allow for teachers to share and discuss ideas more broadly. If vital issues emerge, then time should be allocated to discuss them, either immediately in the meeting or parked for another occasion when they can be more fully discussed. If nothing comes up, then the meeting may finish early, or this time can be absorbed by other parts of the agenda. Again, this needs to be signalled to the team, and space given, so ideas can be comfortably shared.

Timing

Based on some of the issues highlighted above, the discussion and reflection time could be slightly extended to fifteen minutes and structured better. For example:

1. General catch-up (one to two minutes): Allows teachers to build personal connections and rapport, fostering a supportive and collaborative atmosphere.
2. General reflection (three to four minutes): Provides a platform for open discussion, where teachers can freely share and explore various classroom experiences, encouraging broader participation.
3. Focused reflection (three to four minutes): Management-led questions, based on classroom observations to guide teachers to address specific, relevant issues, leading to more targeted and productive discussions.
4. Whole-team sharing (three to four minutes): Plenary, electing ideas and issues, facilitating collective brainstorming and problem-solving, leveraging the diverse experiences and perspectives within the team.

From the above, we can see that group reflection within PLCs is beneficial, helping to foster open and honest dialogue, support and sharing of ideas and the integration of newer teachers within the team. However, there needs to be a tighter integration of the reflection process with other aspects of training and development across the university. For example, using small case studies or scenarios to tie the formal observation data with the reflection, supplementing and enhancing the teachers' ability to notice and reflect on more nuanced or advanced aspects of teaching and learning. Furthermore, to support experienced teachers, there needs to be a better link between the reflection task and more advanced aspects, such as teacher training, line management and materials design. These skills can then be further developed by mentoring and supporting teachers into advanced roles within the team. Finally, there needs to be more structure with distinct stages to guide teachers through a more meaningful reflective process, that helps to fully capitalise on the various beneficial aspects of the process. These stages and their purpose need to be communicated to the teachers to support buy-in and engagement.

Conclusion

Teaching is a highly complex activity where providing the right learning can be challenging for institutions that rely solely on more traditional forms of support and development. Individual reflections and collective insights from Professional Learning Communities can enhance knowledge creation and sharing, leading to both improved individual and organisational learning. Institutional leadership's support remains paramount in ensuring there is space for not only more formal support and professional development but also reflection within Professional Learning Communities. Though support is needed from management, there needs to be a more nuanced approach to managing reflection, to ensure all members of the team benefit and there is a tighter integration between the more formal training processes and these more informal emergent aspects.

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Teacher Education during "unteachable" times: Teacher preparation and induction in areas of intractable conflict and war

By Julia Schlam Salman and Brigitta R. Schvarcz, Israel

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to describe and highlight guidelines we have formulated as English Language Teacher (ELT) educators working in an area of intractable conflict and war. Such conflicts persist over time, resist resolution, and often include violence. Usually, the two "sides" experience irreconcilable moral and ethno-religious disagreements and each sees the other as an existential threat (Burgess and Burgess, 2003). The Israeli-Palestinian case is frequently referred to as an intractable conflict given that both peoples consider themselves to be indigenous to the same, small geographical region and remain in protracted discord. This article presents four tenets grounded in the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity) model aiming to support English language teacher education during times of escalation and war.

Background

We live in Israel and prepare a diverse group of future English teachers including Israelis, Palestinians, Jews, Christians and Muslims. Our students reflect a range of ages and different linguistic, ethnic, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds, representing identities that extend beyond the broad ethnoreligious identifications mentioned above. We are committed to exploring how language, and in particular, the English language, can promote a society that ensures prosperity, safety and wellbeing for all. This includes considering the role language teachers and language teacher educators can play in advancing such an endeavor.

We advocate looking at our region through what the journalist Thomas Friedman calls a "kaleidoscope" where accurate representation requires acknowledging and upholding nuances and complexities. Friedman argues that if you look at people's "stories through a kaleidoscope, observing the complexity of their interactions, you can see hope. If you want to report accurately about Israelis and Palestinians, always bring a kaleidoscope" (Friedman, 2023). We resist the urge to compartmentalize the conflict into neat binaries of just or unjust while unequivocally condemning the atrocities committed by Hamas and other militant groups that transpired in Israel on October 7th, 2023. The conflict is not a zero-sum game and reinforcing such discourse denies the intertwined reality of the region undermining both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples' possibility for a safe and stable future.

In this short article, we will not directly address the enduring Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Rather, using the VUCA (*Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity*) model (for further information see Bennett and Lemoine, 2014, Stein, 2021), we will focus on lessons we have learned about teaching and learning during "unteachable" times characterized by extreme conflict and violence. Building on this framework, we describe four tenets for advancing language teacher education under such duress. In particular, we address the following: i) maintaining expectations for future teachers in the face of volatility; ii) complementing expectations with empathy and social and emotional wellbeing in times of uncertainty; iii) reacting to complexity with critical thinking and clarity; iv) countering ambiguity with vulnerability and empathy.

1. Maintaining expectations for future teachers in the face of volatility

Extreme circumstances, such as war, require creative and unconventional solutions within teacher education frameworks. Educational programs and professional development ideally continue, albeit under difficult circumstances. A natural tendency, perhaps, is to lean into compromise around standards and expectations. However, *doing* and *achieving* is an antidote to helplessness. When we model professionalism and empathetically maintain high expectations, our learners may rise to the occasion. Especially in uncertain and volatile times, such as the current Israel-Hamas War, teacher educators need to infuse future teachers with a sense of agency and advocacy. A component of this is sustaining professional progress towards the goal of becoming a teacher and sending a clear, unwavering message that despite unspeakable tragedy, students can continue on their paths to fulfilling their goal of becoming teachers. Pursuing a degree, in the face of volatility, helps learners to act independently, make decisions, and exert control over their learning process – such qualities are imperative for future teacher sustainability, retention and success. Prior research on teacher retention suggests that teachers who have an ability to act independently make decisions and exert control, ultimately, remain in the field (Carmel and Badash, 2018, Levi et.al., 2023).

The notion of maintaining expectations can be extended to the student-teachers and their practicum. Over 200,000 Israelis have been evacuated from their homes on the frontlines of the war either from the southern and northern borders of Israel (Staff, 2003), resulting in internally displaced children with whom student-teachers may engage. These children have been placed in schools in districts that are sometimes on a higher socioeconomic index than their home communities. Despite a possible inclination to expect or demand little from these children, some of whom have experienced unspeakable tragedies, educators should avoid what is sometimes referred to as the "soft bigotry of low expectations", as coined by Michael Gerson (George W. Bush's Speech to the NAACP, 1999). This involves expecting individuals from disadvantaged

backgrounds to meet lower behavioral or achievement standards than those set for the general population. Meaningful learning and achievements can serve as a remedy for feelings of helplessness and function as an anchor for resilience.

Steps we can take to maintain high expectations under extreme circumstances include first acknowledging the challenges and then providing support and making adjustments for those affected by the war. This might include making pedagogical accommodations to the material and content, scaffolding assignments and extending deadlines. Nevertheless, despite volatility, it remains crucial to uphold standards and ensure that future teachers achieve a specific level of professional knowledge and acquire a rich basket of competencies.

2. Complementing expectations with empathy and social and emotional wellbeing in times of uncertainty

Alongside acknowledging the emotional turmoil experienced by many, the integration of social and emotional wellbeing becomes paramount for ensuring a balance between prioritizing student welfare and advancing their academic achievements. Learning is a cognitive, social and emotional process, which involves both the mind and the body (Bryson and Siegel, 2012). When we attend to learners' social and emotional needs, they are better equipped to persevere, master difficult academic content and meet high expectations (CASEL, 2020). Attending to learners' wellbeing transpires alongside academic achievement, without compromising either. This allows for the creation of safe and stable classroom environments that can focus on learning.

In the Israeli context, pre-service teachers and their teacher educators must navigate unfathomable challenges stemming from the enduring, intractable conflict inflamed by October 7th and the subsequent Israel-Hamas War. This includes different levels of adversity for all peoples, with the particularly difficult reality of family members who have been killed or loved ones who are being held hostage. Future teachers need to be able to navigate their learners' social and emotional wellbeing, even amidst such difficult circumstances.

Building on principles established by CASEL (2020) and Zacharian (2021), here we offer several steps for preserving learner social and emotional wellbeing, especially during times of extreme uncertainty. First, we advocate taking the time to cultivate and build positive relationships with learners. This includes becoming familiar with their backgrounds, learning about their likes and dislikes, and, when possible, integrating their interests into the course content. Equally critical is ensuring that the class expectations are clear and that all students have access to the learning materials. This is fundamental to creating safe, supportive and equitable learning environments. Another important aspect is being organized and intentional about the students' learning. Finally, and particularly in situations of war and ongoing violence, teachers must wear the prism of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and take into consideration learners' basic needs and conditions "to feel safe, welcome and ready to learn" (Pentón Herrera, 2020, p. 11).

Israel is a small country, and the prevalence of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity is such that teachers and teacher educators will likely work with learners directly impacted by the war. In fact, both authors currently teach students who have family members being held hostage in Gaza. In addition, teachers may face a variety of challenges that require heightened social and emotional competencies including learners who have recently been orphaned, children who were hostages and returned, and internally displaced children. The reality is such that embracing social and emotional wellbeing cannot be "a shifting educational fad. It [must be part of] the substance of education itself" (The Aspen Institute, n.d.).

3. Reacting to complexity with critical thinking and clarity

The third tenet we address relates to the relationship between complexity and critical thinking in an age where information is instantly available and quickly disseminated, primarily through social media outlets. More than ever, teachers need to adopt a cautious stance towards sources of information, checking for logic, historical facts and evidence. A component of this includes cultivating higher-order thinking skills, such as reflective thinking, critical thinking, and self-monitoring, which can then foster an awareness and sensitivity to multiple perspectives.

In areas of intractable conflict, where competing narratives are sometimes presented as polar opposites, each with a monopoly on "absolute" truth, maintaining complexity alongside critical thinking and clarity becomes even more imperative. This is especially true when the global discourse on the region involves perspectives from individuals with minimal knowledge or expertise, which contributes to the flow of disinformation. Among other things, classroom teachers are tasked with scaffolding language and making it accessible to learners. They need to be equipped to guide their students towards multiple resources and perspectives. One means for beginning this process is introducing students to concepts such as the CRAAP Test (Blakeslee, 2004; Gabriel and Caro, 2019) or the SMART Check (University of Chicago Library, n.d.). Both strategies can be employed to determine the validity, reliability, accuracy, and purpose of information sources.

It is critical that future teachers learn how to navigate information and misinformation as well as the ability to grapple with multifaceted ideas and recognize that "truths" are more complex that the soundbites presented via social media posts or other news outlets. Teacher educators carry the responsibility to cascade critical thinking skills onto future teachers who must bring such lenses into their classrooms. Teacher educators can encourage their students to navigate multiple sources and to sit with complexity, resisting the urge to adopt simple slogans such as *civilized and uncivilized*, *oppressor and victim* and *occupier and occupied*. Having looked critically at sources of information, teachers

can then lean into reflective thinking skills including an inspection of their assumptions and values, an evaluation of evidence presented, and an assessment of their conclusions (Petress, 2005). This requires a willingness to embrace complexity, dismantle binary thinking and lean into vulnerability in order to lead with empathy.

4. Accepting ambiguity alongside vulnerability and empathy

The final tenet, ambiguity, extends from the preceding three and serves as a point where they coalesce. Ambiguity requires being open to more than one interpretation while still maintaining professional and academic expectations, concern for collegial emotional wellbeing and accurate, fact-based critical thinking. Accepting ambiguity necessitates dismantling mindsets of absolutism around beliefs and ideologies in order to create an environment conducive to opportunities for hearing about other people's experiences, perspectives and responses. Contingent to this is embracing vulnerability and empathy, even when the topics are difficult and emotionally charged.

Israeli and Palestinian nationhood remains a highly contentious, present-day conflict, which is regularly broadcasted on social media and news outlets. Depending on the language and the medium of consumption, different pictures of the conflict get constructed resulting in diverging, seemingly irreconcilable interpretations. However, differing individual experiences need not render one perspective as wrong and the other one as right. Subjective, individual experiences are filtered through different understandings of history, ideology, and endured trauma. These can exist alongside descriptive facts.

Teacher educators carry a collective responsibility to facilitate the critical thinking of future teachers, encouraging them to be vulnerable and promote empathy, while helping them to avoid half-truths, questionable evidence and ultimately, conspiracy theories. Empathizing with the suffering of others – even when it contradicts one's own feelings – does not diminish from one's own pain and suffering.

The following incident, which recently occurred in one of the authors' classes, illustrates this tenet. In a lesson over Zoom that included a diverse group of students, missile sirens wailed. The lesson was stopped so the students impacted could take cover in bomb shelters. Students who were not in the Tel-Aviv region stayed in the meeting, and one of them felt strongly about acknowledging previous bombings that had occurred in Gaza. The student seemed unable to empathize with the fear and anxiety being experienced at that moment by her peers. Students frantically running into bomb shelters to avoid getting hit by a barrage of missiles being launched into a densely populated civilian area can be recognized as genuinely terrifying, without diminishing from the threats and bombardments transpiring in Gaza. Groups need not monopolize fear; it is visceral and innate. Fear is not a zero-sum game – neither is compassion.

Vulnerability and empathy require being uncomfortable and suspending reified ideologies in the name of constructive dialogue (Brown, 2015). Embracing ambiguity of experience alongside a commitment to factual information, is crucial to ending cycles of absolutism and violence and can bring us closer to a region characterized by safety and prosperity.

Conclusion and future possibilities

In the face of extreme circumstances, such as war and violence, which are, by definition, volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, maintaining tenets can be an anchor for perseverance. Amidst a VUCA environment, teacher education frameworks benefit from planning for eventual success and a return to routine. High-caliber teachers are an intricate part of the engine that enables a society to project stability and, ultimately, to thrive and flourish. Recognizing the critical role teachers play in society, even in times of great discord, we reiterate the following key principles:

- Despite the challenges faced, maintaining high expectations becomes essential for fostering professionalism and resilience among teaching professionals.
- Academic success materializes within safe and stable learning environments and parallel to students' social and emotional wellbeing.
- Information (and misinformation) saturation requires the cultivation of critical thinking skills as well as an ability to navigate the complexity of multiple perspectives carefully and responsibly.
- Safety and prosperity, particularly in areas of conflict, necessitate acknowledging ambiguity while embracing vulnerability and empathy. Constructive dialogue requires dismantling absolutist viewpoints and recognizing diverse (and diverging) perspectives.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to be defined as intractable with the recent atrocities and outright war reaffirming the seemingly protracted and irreconcilable nature of the conflict. Nevertheless, in our small way, we seek to dismantle notions of inevitability and weave into our teacher education classrooms the outlined tenets. There, Hebrew and Arabic speakers, as well as speakers of other languages, come together to prepare for careers as English language teachers. Many are full of optimism, motivation, and curiosity. They remain committed to a future that we cannot yet envision. We, too, are unsure where to find light amidst the darkness and uncertainty, but we remain steadfast in our belief that empowered, competent and knowledgeable future teachers must be part of the equation.

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Many hands, light work: team-teaching within the Hands Up project

By Nick Bilbrough, Hands Up Project Coordinator, UK

Introduction

The article below was originally published in the ELT Gazette in 2021 (reprinted here with kind permission). Though it provides an overview of some of the innovative learning activities previously undertaken by Hands up volunteer teachers in Palestine and around the world, it does not, of course, reflect in any way the reality of how the Hands up Project operates in the post October 7th world.

The vast majority of teachers and students in Gaza have now been internally displaced, all are suffering from trauma from experiencing prolonged bombing and the loss of family and friends, and many have been killed. Many of the schools and universities that we worked very closely with over a number of years have been deliberately bombed or destroyed in controlled explosions.

In the occupied West Bank the situation is less catastrophic but there has still been a systematic and direct attack on education, resulting in the administrative detention of children and many school closures for safety reasons. In the article below I outline how we moved a lot of our operations over from Zoom to Facebook Live because of the Covid pandemic. We have been forced to do this again because in many areas where there is heightened settler violence against Palestinians, it is simply not safe for children to leave their homes to go to school.

Despite everything that has happened these past few months, we remain hopeful that The Hands up Project and, more broadly, English language learning and teaching in Palestine, will ultimately survive and continue to thrive. As with other deeply oppressed teaching and learning environments around the world, this can be attributed, not to the educational system, nor the infrastructure or the curriculum, but rather to the resourcefulness, resilience, love of learning and heart felt willingness of Palestinian students and teachers to connect to the world outside.

https://www.handsupproject.org/

Background

The Hands Up Project is a UK registered educational charity, providing online learning opportunities for young people, mostly in Palestine, through conversation, storytelling and drama activities. Since we began operating, team teaching (with at least one teacher from the community of the learners, working together with at least one other connecting remotely from another country) has always been an important feature of what we do. In this article I'd like to explore how and why we do this, and look at some specific examples of HUP team teaching in practice, from both the *pre* Covid 19, and *post* Covid-19 world.

All experienced teachers will know that, if we want to help our learners to develop their speaking skills, we need to be at least as good at listening as we are at speaking. Not only do we need excellent listening skills as teachers, but we also need to be able to listen in two distinct ways. Firstly we need to listen to *what* learners are saying so that they appreciate that a foreign language, like their mother tongue, may be used as a tool to communicate ideas, express their identities and share their feelings. Secondly, we need to listen to *how* they are saying it, and this way we can notice whether or not they are improving in their abilities to express themselves, and potentially we can find ways to support their spoken language to develop.

A pre-Covid 19 example

The picture below shows a typical team-taught Hands up project session before the corona pandemic forced schools in Palestine to close. Atiyyeh is an English teacher in a small village, close to Ramallah in Occupied Palestine. He's running an after school English class for a small group of around fifteen 14 to 15 year old boys. Michael is an actor and a professional storyteller and he's connecting remotely through Zoom to Atiyyeh's class from his home in Bristol in the UK. But Michael isn't acting or telling stories, he's simply talking to the boys, listening to what they're saying and generally chatting with them. The boys are generally taking it in turns to come up to the laptop and interact directly with Michael, whilst the others listen. Occasionally Atiyyeh will ask Michael to pause, so that he can focus explicitly on some of the language that Michael's used, or even set up a drill or a practise activity. He might even ask Michael to repeat the words that he's used or to provide other examples. The point is that Atiyyeh, as the teacher, is mainly in charge of the pacing of the discourse and making it accessible and useful to the learners, and Michael's responsibility is mainly about keeping the conversation going. Both roles are important of course, and together they provide a pedagogical and a social aspect to the conversation.

These types of conversation where you have a classroom teacher and a remote volunteer working in unison can be very rich in language learning opportunities. Here's a transcript of a short extract of another such conversation. Ahmed is a 15 year old boy in Palestine and he's been asked to talk briefly with the remote volunteer about his home. Notice how the support provided by both the remote volunteer and the classroom teacher provides a safe scaffold whereby which the student can experiment with new vocabulary and the meaning and form of the present perfect versus present continuous tense.

Ahmed:*…In the village we have another home in the village is away from the home we are living in. He's to my brother and my dad he's build the a home up our home (The classroom teacher provides him with 'second floor') a second floor*
Remote volunteer: *aha*
Ahmed*: For me*
Remote volunteer: *Your dad, did you say he has built it, or he's building it? He has built it?*
Ahmed: *He's a builder.*
Remote volunteer: *No but did you say he has built it or he is building it?*
Ahmed: *He is building for me a home for me*
Remote volunteer: *He's building it now? When will it be finished?*
Ahmed*: Next year on the summer*

A post-Covid 19 example

In March 2020 all of this went out of the window of course. As Covid 19 stuck in the West Bank and fears about it reaching Gaza were raised, schools all over Palestine we're closed until July. Suddenly we couldn't do any of the things that we'd been doing and would have to completely reinvent ourselves. We did this by moving all of our operations to Facebook live with immediate effect. This meant that we could no longer see or hear the participating children, and the only way they could engage was through writing comments. On the other hand, there were also certain advantages to this way of working during lockdown.

Advantages of doing sessions on Facebook live

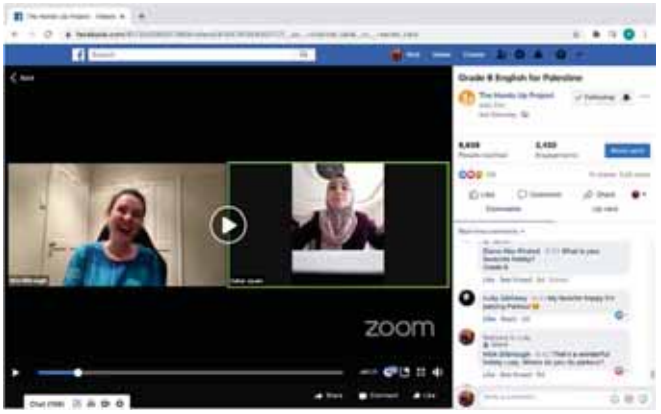
1. Students can access the sessions from their own homes – using weaker internet than is required for zoom sessions -and just a mobile phone if they don't have a laptop.
2. A far greater number of students could access a single session. Some of our Facebook sessions have had literally thousands of views.
3. Students can potentially get support from family members with English or the technical aspects of accessing the sessions. In some situations, where children have a higher level of English, and/or more advanced technical skills than their parents or grandparents, this support process may actually be working in the opposite direction.
4. Since all the recordings are stored on the hands up project's Facebook page (see examples here https://www.facebook.com/watch/handsupproject/375084847213720/), students can re-watch the sessions later for extra practice, or watch them when it is convenient for them.
5. Students can write comments as a way to practise and develop their written English.
6. There are many teachers present in the sessions (from many different countries) who can provide the kind of scaffolding outlined above to the learners' comments. It also serves as a teacher development tool for the teachers themselves, as they see other ways of working and may get new ideas for their own classes.
7. Since the sessions are free and open to anyone, there are opportunities for learners in Palestine to meet and interact with other learners of English around the world.

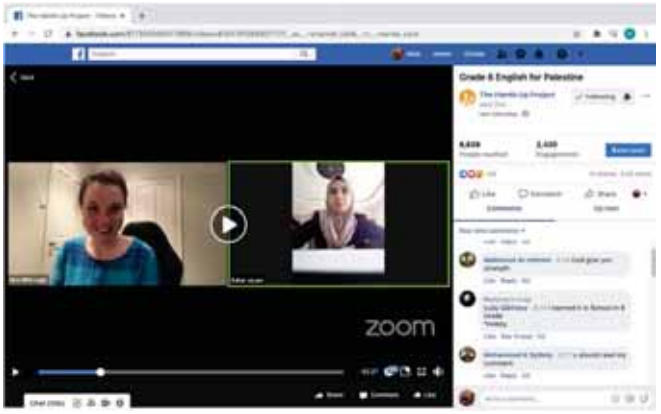
We also didn't lose anything at all in terms of the benefits of team teaching that were present in our pre-covid sessions. In fact there was another kind of team teaching going on, where one teacher was delivering the session, but other teachers who were watching the session were responding, clarifying, and scaffolding what was written in the comments. Later we'll look at an example of that.

During the second lockdown that took place from August 2020 to the present date we introduced a new concept - Team-taught curriculum based Facebook live sessions. For these sessions, we went live on Facebook through Zoom, so the two teachers could be visible and audible to the participants on Facebook. For each grade we had one Palestinian teacher working in tandem with another English teacher from another location in the world. Typically, the two teachers would focus on areas of language from the course book 'English for Palestine'. They might propose personalised practise activities for the students to take part in the comments, and they might talk to each other, perhaps demonstrating the activity themselves before-hand. These conversations between the teachers provide excellent models for the learners but also expose them to natural conversational English, something which is often lacking from standard classrooms.

In one of these sessions, lead by Sahar Siam from Gaza and Lauren Edmondson from Australia (https://www.facebook.com/917350095017969/videos/815479105930117) the two teachers are discussing their hobbies as a way to review the present simple tense. They then invite the students to write what their own hobbies are in the comments.

Notice from the screenshots below, how the same type of scaffolded interaction discussed earlier is taking place in the comments, albeit in a written rather than spoken, form.





In summary, I'd like to suggest that both the pre-covid, and the post-covid variants of team-teaching within Hands up Project sessions offer something different from what is possible in their regular classes. Both teachers bring different skills and qualities to the table, and working together they may provide a very rich source of learning.

What the local teacher may bring to the table

1. In-depth knowledge of the curriculum (thereby more easily catering towards success in local exams)
2. In-depth knowledge of classroom practices which learners in Palestine are familiar with (thereby creating a secure and safe learning environment)
3. In-depth knowledge of both Arabic, the L1 of the learners and English (thereby being able to translate where necessary, and being aware of potential difficulties with English)
4. In-depth knowledge of the learners' individual personalities, their strengths and their weaknesses (thereby being able to choose activities which suit their learning preferences)
5. Cultural knowledge (thereby being better able to build a sense of shared community with the learners)

What the foreign teacher may bring to the table

1. In-depth knowledge of classroom practices which may be new and motivating for learners (and teachers) in Palestine (thereby nurturing a spirt of adventure)
2. A motivating stimulus for the learners to use English (because of a lack of L1 knowledge and a general lack of knowledge about the learners)
3. A source of exposure to more international/non-Palestinian forms of English (thereby increasing the level of challenge)
4. A reason for the local teacher to use natural spoken English (thereby providing an excellent model for the learners)
5. Intercultural knowledge which can be shared (thereby helping to situate their learning of English into a more global context)

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Creating a framework for motivating learners

By Marjorie Rosenberg, Austria

Introduction

As we are all aware, motivation can be a tricky subject for learners, teachers and teacher trainers. This article aims to break down this elusive trait into manageable chunks and suggest a framework along with practical ideas for the classroom. Due to the complexity of the subject, definitions, explanations and characteristics of motivation are given followed by a structure or frame of reference which breaks down activities into specific areas. As learners, however, do not always fit neatly into categories, teachers are reminded that some may not respond as hoped and ideas are provided as an aid. The framework allows the teacher flexibility to create their own learning environment and to experiment with a variety of ideas in order to engage learners.

Background

Motivation is certainly a major factor when it comes to learning a new language. However, this is an area which is difficult to train teachers in as learners' motivation does not truly originate with us. Even in looking at the definition, we can see that it must come from the learner themself. As Zoltan Dörnyei (2001) says, motivation includes the choice of an action, the effort used to work on it and the persistence shown in achieving a goal. Teachers and teacher trainers often search for a way to explain this particular human trait, but it is still quite elusive. There is certainly a major difference between the motivation in learning a language before we begin school and working later to learn a second, third, fourth one. The acquisition of a first or even multiple languages by children comes from the need to communicate with those around them creating intrinsic motivation which is often rewarded by successfully being able to express their needs. For adults, having to learn an unfamiliar language when moving to a new country, to study, to travel, to manage everyday needs, or to hold down a job may be influenced by social or workplace requirements which can also lead to intrinsic motivation. However, many learners may find that their motivation comes from wanting to please others or a goal of doing well on an exam and they may need more help from their teachers to encourage learning and provide extrinsic motivation.

Characteristics of motivation

According to Dörnyei (2001), there are a number of characteristics of motivation. These include the attitudes and value systems of learners, their quest for success, how goal-oriented they are, realistic beliefs they hold, what stimulates them, their self-confidence and how they work at reducing anxiety, general learner satisfaction and group cohesiveness. The following framework for activities includes many of these factors. It has been designed to increase the interest and motivation of students, giving teachers possibilities to meet learners' needs and providing a wide range of activities in the classroom. These activities are broken down into eight categories allowing educators the chance to decide for themselves which ones work for them and their learners and how to best implement the ideas. As these motivational characteristics do not work for every learner, each of them also includes a caveat to take into account when planning lessons.

Personalisation

Starting off, we have p*ersonalisation*. The topic people are generally most interested in is themselves. For this reason, finding activities which allow them to discuss their own experiences, opinions and personal interests, topics relevant to their lives, and offer learners the opportunity to share their thoughts with others, generally means a high level of engagement during a lesson. Some of the practical activities which work well are a personalised dictation in which learners listen to sentences read aloud but only write down the ones that are true or relevant for them. Another option is to put them into groups and have the groups write fictional accounts of what another group had done together over the weekend. This can be adapted by first giving learners specific vocabulary to use or showing some photos or pictures and asking them to expand on the topic. A good writing activity is asking learners to write about a first time experience they personally had and describe what happened to them and how they felt at the time. As a good way to get to know each other, they can be asked to make mind maps which include key words of the information they are willing to share. They then exchange the mind maps with a partner and ask each other questions. As they have chosen the topics themselves, it keeps the conversation going in a direction they have set the parameters for and prevents uncomfortable topics from entering the conversation. It is important to remember when setting up these activities that not everyone is happy sharing personal and private information with others.

Movement

The next category is *movement*. There are learners who become frustrated or are unable to concentrate if they have to sit for too long in one place. Moving about can help feed the brain with oxygen and connect new material with specific movements, making it easier for some to remember what they learned. Any sort of manipulatives (items they can touch), board games, card games, mimes, role plays or simulations fit this category. Teachers can create or find jigsaw puzzles designed for language learning, cards to match together or use to play "Memory" or "Bingo" or in a mingling activity. Songs or chants involving movement of any kind and gap texts with missing words on cards also fit into this category. Another activity which works well is putting learners in groups and telling them that they have to find a physical feat that one

person in the group can do (roll their tongue, walk on their hands, etc.). They then have the person demonstrate this to the other groups and use the sentence “Can you do this?” and then name the activity. If no one else can rise to the challenge, the group who bet no one else would succeed gets two points, if someone in another group can do it, they get one point. However, keep in mind that not everyone is happy moving about and if a learner does not want to participate in more active games, we may need to let them sit it out or function as the observer.

Emotions

Moving on, we come to e*motions*. We can approach this subject by simply eliciting the vocabulary needed to explain emotions, categorizing them into positive or negative ones and discussing how strong their meanings are. Music or artwork can also be used as prompts to get learners to discuss how they feel. Activities which can be used include simple statements such as “Today I feel ..., because ...” or turning the activity into a guessing game and having the others guess how a classmate feels and giving their opinions and reasons. Learners can be asked to talk about their favourite memories and what exactly they entail, and learners can try to guess others’ favorite clothing or food or places and what the emotional connection is to them. Students can also try to guess where someone had their favourite holiday based on what they say about it. Emotions, however, can be a tricky subject in the classroom and need to be handled with care and empathy.

Intellectual

Some learners are motivated by activities which are seen as *intellectual*. They enjoy using higher-order thinking skills, such as critical thinking and problem-solving. These students often enjoy exercises involving error correction or logic puzzles. They may also be motivated by structures, such as those involving grammar or vocabulary or learning how to put together a piece of writing in a logical way. They may well enjoy inductive grammar where they themselves determine the rules after looking at examples. Many of these types of activities are available for the classroom and photocopiable books or coursebooks often include logic or math puzzles, error correction and ask for both critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Specific types of guessing games in which some information is available but not all, putting events in the correct order, tasks in which learners decide what to take with them on a trip and give the reasons for their choices or even find the differences in pictures are activities which appeal to this type of learner. Remember, however, that some may become frustrated if a task is too difficult and others may not want to have to determine their own grammar rules from examples.

Creativity

The next category is *creativity*, a category that can be used to fire the imagination and make use of music and art in the classroom. Story telling techniques are also valuable and the role of storyteller can be done by the teacher or a learner. Many classrooms make use of a variety of drama techniques and learners can put on short theatre pieces or improvise on topics by using information they are given as a basis. An activity that has proven to be successful is having learners create their own home. They were put into small groups of four to six and given some possibilities for a place to live such as in a windmill, on a desert island, in a forest, in a big city, etc. and asked to choose the one where they would like to create a home for all of them together. They were then given the assignment to find relevant photos or drawings on the internet or in magazines and bring them to class where they were given paper, pens, scissors, glue, etc. and asked to create a drawing or a blueprint of their home. The final step was a mini-presentation of their creation and what each of them particularly liked about it. As some learners may feel threatened by the idea of having to be creative, working in groups lets them bounce ideas off each other and can take away the fear from those who have it.

Relevance

And now we come to *relevance*. There are current events or up-to-date topics which may need to be acknowledged in the classroom and we have to find ways to deal with them. We also need to find activities which are purposeful and connected to the reality and the real worlds of our learners. We can start off by eliciting vocabulary from our students in order to discuss topics they feel are important or to set up debates in the classroom. If possible, we can invite guests to class and have our learners ask them questions about their work, where they come from, and so on. An activity I have found helpful to give learners practice in seeing both sides of an argument as well as being able to justify their opinions is to use dice for discussions. A topic is chosen and learners roll the dice which determines if they have to find positive aspects (numbers two, four and six) or negative ones (numbers one, three and five). For advanced groups, they can even be told to use as many arguments as possible in favour of the topic or against it according to the number rolled on the dice without repeating any which were said earlier. This activity prompts thinking of relevant situations and learning how to see an issue from more than one side. Another activity calls for using mobile phones and asking learners to choose a photo they have and either describing it to another person, talking about why the photo is important to them or having the other person guess what the photo is about after hearing only a few key words. This can be done in pairs or in a whole class mingling activity. It is important to remember, however, that when discussing relevant topics, certain ones may be taboo for some learners.

Fun

Activities that generally motivate the majority of learners are those that are *fun*. Finding jokes for the classroom, creating silly answers to questions or watching amusing videos are possibilities for motivating activities. Guessing games such as “I spy with my little eye ...” or putting cartoons into the correct order can liven up the classroom and engage learners. When these are used for language learning purposes, they are not only something to enjoy but become a tool to help learners. Riddles with questions and answers can be used as a listening comprehension by putting the questions and replies on cards and distributing them. Learners with questions read them aloud and those with answers have to respond with the correct ones. Cartoons can be chosen specifically for the language or the grammar they use and can be used as repetition of tenses or to repeat vocabulary that learners have already been introduced to. They can be given photos and asked to write silly captions for them. We do need to be aware, though, that there may be some learners who feel that language learning must be taken seriously, and we might have to point out the specific benefits of these activities to them. Humour and cartoons can also touch on cultural sensitivities and may not be suitable for every group or even be found offensive.

Variety

Finally, we come to *variety*, the last category in the framework. It includes using different forms of input and output or mixing the methods we use. We can introduce vocabulary, for example, by miming it, writing it on the board, scrambling the letters and having learners guess or give definitions. Another option is making use of cooperative learning activities and forming new groups. We can put learners into so-called “Home Groups” of four to six people and let them come up with a name and a motto. They are then assigned numbers in their home groups and all those with the same number are put into so-called “Expert Groups”. They are then given a task such as answering specific questions, doing some research, reading an article or part of an article, etc. When they have finished, the “Expert Groups” are dissolved, and learners go back to their “Home Group” where the experts in the group either answer questions from the teacher or describe what they learned or read. The experts in the other groups are then asked if the answers were correct or not. This type of peer work can be very motivating for both advanced and less advanced learners as learning from each other is sometimes more understandable than only hearing the explanations of the teacher. Of course, some will be more comfortable with one method than another, but a variety of methods generally keeps the attention of most of the learners most of the time.

Conclusion

This framework has come out of several decades of working with a variety of tertiary and adult learners and provides a number of possibilities for teachers to try out for themselves. They have been designed to be relevant, to fire learners’ imaginations, to allow them to store material in different places, to provide language they can take out of the classroom and use, to experiment and experience success in learning, and to engage and inspire students to continue on their language learning path. They are also used to help learners reach goals, provide moments of success, create cohesiveness in the

classroom, address values and attitudes, reduce anxiety and boost self-confidence. It is always important to remember, however, that learners differ widely and what motivates one may not motivate another. Therefore, we need to stay adaptable and flexible as well as include our learners in a feedback loop. We can only offer ideas we have, but the intrinsic motivation we hope to encourage must still come from the learners themselves.

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The author

Marjorie Rosenberg, based in Austria, has been teaching English and training teachers for over forty years. She is interested in understanding how learners learn and has written several methodology books on learner preferences and learning styles. Her other projects include coursebooks in the field of business English and several books of photocopiable activities. She is also an active conference presenter and keynote speaker. Marjorie is currently serving as the IATEFL BESIG Joint-Coordinator and is a past president of IATEFL.

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An interview with
Applying approaches to equality, diversity and inclusion in ELT – myths and realities!

By Varinder Ünlü, UK, interviewed by Phil Dexter

Introduction

In this issue of *The Pilgrims Teacher Trainer Journal*, we are delighted to interview Varinder Ünlü who has campaigned throughout her professional career for principled approaches to understanding and implementing equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the ELT profession. Everyone today commits to EDI but what is the reality of current practice and why does it seem difficult to align actual practice with these commitments? Varinder gives her views on this below and does not duck from what might be controversial. Many organisations believe they are diverse though their practice suggest otherwise. This may be difficult to read/hear for some! We hope Varinder's comments and personal experience will inspire our readers of the journal to consider how you can practically apply approaches to EDI in your own work. As we know, evidence informed global practice in implementing EDI can really support us – but it's what we do in our local contexts that is the difference that can make the difference.

Phil Dexter, Editor

PD: Can you tell me briefly something about yourself, your recent and current work for our readers?

VU: I have worked in the ELT industry for over 30 years. My first teaching job was in Izmir, Turkey. For most of my career, I have been in management – as a Director of Studies, Academic Manager but throughout it, I have also worked as a teacher trainer. My journey has seen me teaching in private language schools, FE colleges, and HE. I co-founded the IATEFL Inclusive Practices and SEN SIG. My current job is as Teacher Training and Development Manager for a school in London, where I am responsible for taking care of a large team of CELTA and DELTA trainers and supporting trainees from all backgrounds.

PD: What aspects of education inspire you most as a teacher educator/teacher trainer?

VU: Learning happening in a classroom and a training room gives me joy, but what inspires me the most is when learners with additional learning needs achieve success. I have been very lucky to have supported not only students and teacher trainees, but also staff with often undiagnosed additional needs.

PD: I know that equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in language teaching and education is central to all you do. Can you say what the essence of this work is for you?

VU: I have always advocated for diversity and inclusion, not just in this industry but well before I trained as a teacher, at secondary school, and at my first job as a bank manager. I am a first-generation immigrant and back in the late 70s, my family moved to London. I had just turned seven and I was sent to a junior school, where no one spoke my language, and no one looked like me. The teachers had no idea what to do with me and I would often be left alone to figure things out for myself. Throughout my early education, I was held back, not because I was not intelligent enough, but because I wasn't able to speak English. Secondary school was no different, and rather than supporting me and other pupils like me, we were left behind. What teachers failed to notice or understand was that we all needed support with learning English, and we were as intelligent, if not more so, than our English-speaking classmates. We weren't given the same opportunities as our native English classmates. This experience pushed me to fight for equality and to be included, to be seen and heard.

PD: We know EDI is a buzz word today in ELT and education – in your view where are we in successful (or otherwise) implementation of good practice approaches in EDI?

VU: EDI is such a buzzword! The number of times people will talk publicly about something, and the words "inclusion" and "diversity" are thrown in for good measure. However, we are so very far from being inclusive or diverse. It's because no one really knows what it is and how it should be implemented. Almost all organisations these days will have EDI policies in place, but how realistic these are is another matter. I think Further Education and Higher Education are a little better and ahead of private English language schools.

PD: Can you give some practical examples of what we can do better?

VU: There's so much we could be doing better. The first step would be to start with admitting there's a problem. Whenever I raise the topic with senior managers, they fail to see what the issue is. Once we have opened our eyes and ears, then we can start moving towards more diverse and inclusive work environments. I believe the problems are:

- Resistance to change – when we challenge organisations and individuals to think about EDI differently, people resist for various reasons – personal biases, fear of losing their privileges, or that inclusion is just not necessary.
- Unconscious bias – we talk about this a lot when we discuss EDI. It is incredibly difficult to change in people as this is deeply ingrained and often people are not even aware of their prejudices. We know that unconscious biases influence so many things, including decision-making, they perpetuate inequality and hold back attempts to create inclusive environments.
- Lack of understanding of what inclusion means, why it's important, and how to implement it.
- Every organisation has policies on just about everything. However, these can often be exclusionary and discriminatory, creating barriers instead of removing them. Acknowledging these barriers and addressing them is difficult as it means significant changes to the way schools operate. I have found that more often than not, EDI policies are usually copied and pasted from another organisation, and this means they are not appropriate to individual contexts. What suits and works for one school does not necessarily work for all.
- Tokenism – some schools fear that they will be accused of tokenism and therefore do not engage in the diversity and inclusion discussion. Making superficial efforts to be inclusive is as bad as not making any effort. Authentic inclusion has to occur organically and not be forced just to tick the EDI box.
- To implement inclusion and diversity, schools need the right resources, which include financial investment, time, and personnel. Most organisations simply cannot afford these.

PD: Can you say something about how you see EDI impacts on the relationship between ELT and the importance of mother tongue/first/home language use in teaching and training?

VU: Knowing the importance of the mother tongue or first language is essential. As I have talked about above, my own early experiences in education had a very negative impact on me because my teachers lacked understanding. Telling trainee teachers that they do not need to force the "English only" rule in the classroom is a good start. In our CELTA training rooms, we need to start changing our approach to translation and error correction. In recent years, research into translanguaging and the benefits of this in the classroom has shown us that teachers need to support learners by allowing them to move between languages.

PD: How and to what extent is the concept of intersectionality in EDI important?

VU: Intersectionality in EDI is hugely important. Once we start to understand individual experiences and all the challenges that are faced by different groups of people, then we can start working on improving things. Understanding that inequalities are not experienced in the same way within those groups will help us to recognise there are multiple levels of discrimination and inequalities.

PD: I've discussed recently with some colleagues that as part of intersectionality it's important to understand a concept of inner diversity – does this have a meaning for you?

VU: Once you understand who I am as an individual, you will see the challenges I face as a brown, Asian female working in an industry that is predominantly white in Europe. My ethnicity and race, the country I was born in, my gender identity, my sexual orientation, my physical and cognitive abilities and inabilities are all part of my inner diversity. These all feed into intersectionality.

PD: While your focus is obviously ELT, are there

implications for approaches in broader teacher education?

VU: Definitely. I mentioned earlier that FE and HE are a lot better than ELT. This does not mean they have solved the issues. When we look at teacher training for primary and secondary education worldwide, we know teachers don't feel equipped to deal with EDI matters. We know that pupils don't receive the right kind of support when it comes to additional needs in mainstream education. Teacher education needs to implement EDI into the syllabus, and then we might start seeing some change in our schools and classrooms.

PD: Finally, is there is anything else you would like to add that could be helpful and supportive for teacher educators in understanding and applying EDI in their contexts?

VU: Educate yourselves. So much is written about EDI. Understand that it's not easy, and it takes time to figure out what works and what doesn't. Get to know your context and ask those who make the policies and are in charge of staff training to provide support. Working collaboratively as a whole team, listening to different opinions and experiences will help you identify what the issues are. Don't be afraid to challenge when you see inequalities and discriminatory behaviours and practices.

The author

I have worked in ELT for over 30 years in all contexts, from private language schools to Further Education and Higher Education. I have worked with students of all ages. I have been a DOS/Academic Manager/School Principal since 2002. I am a teacher trainer for both Cambridge CELTA and Trinity TESOL, a materials writer, and an experienced conference speaker. I am the co-founder of the Inclusive Practices and SENs IATEFL SIG and was the coordinator for three years. I have also been the coordinator of IATEFL's Global Issues SIG. I am currently head of Teacher Training and Development at Stafford House London.

I am passionate about equality, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of life, but especially in education, both inside the classroom for our students and outside it for all employees of schools.

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Building a STRONG personal brand on social media

By Gina Rodriguez, Italy

Introduction

Trust me you need to know this!
Building a strong personal brand in ELT matters. The word "brand" might sound like a corporate thing, but the truth is that with the massive use of social media by potential employers, stakeholders and clients, not having a strong social media presence is a missed opportunity. Employers, stakeholders and potential clients regularly check the digital footprint of a professional before they decide whether to work with them or not. Publishers will check the digital footprint of authors and teacher trainers, schools will check the online presence of teachers, and exam boards will check the pages of language schools and profiles before they make a decision to work with them. For this reason, building and curating a personal brand online is key because it paves the way to more and better contracts.

Background

If you still think that building a social media presence to create a personal brand is a trend or just hype, bear with me and I'll show you that building a personal brand is a life saver. Let me tell you my story to illustrate what I mean.

I moved to Italy just after the turn to the new Millennium. I was already a qualified teacher with a teaching degree in English as a foreign language and a CELTA certificate grade B. By then I had already worked in language schools in three different countries. Feeling confident about my experience and qualifications and proud of my letters of recommendation, I began to look for a job as an EFL teacher in Parma and … surprise, surprise … I was turned down at every single place. The reason? My CV ticked many boxes except for the nationality.

I was a non-native teacher of English, and no one really knew me or how I could help students progress. After some painful research, I was offered a position in a language school only because they were short of staff and, of course, I was offered a temporary three-month contract to fill a gap.

There was condition though: I had to avoid talking about my nationality with the students. (They first wanted to convince me to change my name from Gina to Jane, but of course I didn't accept a change of identity.)

At that time, all doors were closed because of my nationality. No one knew me enough to trust that I could do my job well despite being non-native. No one knew me enough professionally to believe I could be a good asset in a language school.

I felt discouraged and before dumping a job that I loved and for which I had studied so much, worked really hard and invested a huge budget in professional development, I decided I would do everything possible to change that

perception and prove I was a skilled teacher, that I knew my stuff and that I could support colleagues and the school management.

For this reason, I began networking with other ELT professionals, attending conferences, and I started participating in focus groups, associations' events and also started to pilot materials. In the meantime, my students had excellent results in job interviews and exams and the word-of-mouth became powerful. I was fully booked, and no one cared that I didn't have a British or American passport. I even became a Cambridge examiner for the full suite and my contract in that school went from three months, then a year and another year until I left.

What had I done right?

Without knowing, I had created a personal brand. I made the quality of my teaching known well enough for the school, students and ELT players to trust me and want to work with me and think of me when they had work. By networking and being proactive, I got the people around me to know me, my personality and competencies; all of which is impossible to get across on a written CV.

"Your brand is what other people say about you when you're not in the room." (Jeff Bezos, 2021)

There are various definitions of personal branding on the net and the one I think embodies the concept really well for us in the ELT sector is this one:

"Your personal brand defines who you are and what you stand for and describes your skills and experiences. Personal branding is a way of showcasing your strengths and personality as well as telling your story." (Thunderbird School of Global Management, 2021)

After five years, I managed to walk through the door of educational publishing as a teacher trainer and consultant for a small publisher thanks to … the personal brand I had created for myself.

Overcoming ELT stereotypes

Two years later, I found myself stepping through a much larger door, securing a position with the leading ELT publisher in Italy and the world at that time. This was a brilliant result for a non-native ELT professional in Italy. Little did I know that I was just starting another battle.

My job as an ELT consultant involved working closely with the Italian sales reps and the Italian teachers of English in the north-east of Italy and both expected an ELT consultant and teacher trainer to be a native speaker. Teachers would say:

"Oh, so you're not British?"

"Rodriguez? That isn't an English surname?"

"You're Uruguayan?! But you lived in England your whole life, didn't you?"

Sales reps would say:
"How come they chose you to be our consultant? We've always had native-speakers!"

These comments were like little stabs all the time and I was afraid of losing my dream job and getting an extra dose of unnecessary stress.

So I was back to square one! Once again, I had to work on my personal brand. As I was operating in a big area, I thought that this time I'd jump on social media and so I started building a personal brand online and more precisely on LinkedIn and Facebook.

I never lost my job and at some point, I was promoted to a senior position as the point of contact with editorial and marketing. I was approached by competitors many times and little by little those annoying questions disappeared. I could finally work in peace without the non-native friendly ghosts tormenting me.

How do you market yourself as an ELT professional?

Drum roll … I boosted the KLT factor. I created visibility layers around me to showcase my skills and to let people get to know me beyond my surname and nationality. Social media allowed me to do so beyond geographical limitations and corporate hierarchy. NB It wasn't only social media, but social media played a HUGE role in this.

Social media is undeniably a powerful tool to make yourself known and generate the so called KLT factor. In other words, this means that potential clients or employers need to know you, like you and trust you to work with you. In situations where you cannot develop the KLT factor because of geographical reasons, like in my case, then the online space is the perfect arena.

To build a successful personal brand on social media means that your content showcases your unique qualities, it reveals your personality, your values and that you use social media strategically. It's not about posting and praying. It's very much about planning, optimizing, being you and being consistent.

To secure more and better job opportunities you don't have to be on every platform. You only need to be where decision makers are and that, in the very first place, is LinkedIn. Those decision makers need to be convinced that you can help them get better results: aka more books sold, more conferences attendees, better and more cutting-edge publications.

So here's another true story. There were two teacher training sessions for state school teachers run by two competing publishers in the same town on the same week. Those type of events are vital for the publishers because it's a unique opportunity to get many teachers' eyeballs on their new publications and a chance to get them adopted in state schools. So the more teachers that come to your event the better. Both publishers had an amazing author. Publisher A's author had won various prizes, had written various coursebooks. Publisher B's author had only one publication, was very active in Facebook groups, had participated in several webinars and was very active on LinkedIn and Facebook. Who got more attendees?

Exactly! Publisher B. Not only did they get more teachers

to the event but also more sales of the coursebook.

I have moved on from educational publishing and I am now flying solo doing ELT marketing and consultancy. I help language schools and ELT professionals build a strong online presence on social media. I have given talks about personal branding in ELT and run training sessions, for example, "How to boost your ELT career with personal branding" for the Continental University of Peru. I'm going to share with you six important steps that I teach in my training sessions to get you started.

The key points for building a personal brand in ELT on Social Media are:
1. Self-assess your interests and likes
2. Build your visibility online
3. Get your name out there offline too
4. Have a cohesive presence in terms of graphics
5. Have a solid content plan
6. Be consistent on social media.

Building visibility on social media is one of the first steps towards building a powerful personal brand. If you don't know where to start, I'd suggest that you start from you. Think about your qualifications, the questions that people usually ask you, about what makes you different from other professionals, your achievements and the lessons you learn along the way. Then it's only a question to plan what you are going to share, where and when.

If you participate in ELT events these are a great springboard to create content for social media that helps you build a personal brand.

In the article "Maximizing Your ELT Conference Experience" I go into detail about how ELT professionals can make the most of their conference experience in terms of social media content by sharing pre-, during- and post-conference experience in creative ways, either as a participant or as a presenter.

Here are some helpful ideas for conference presenters taken from the article:

Summing Up

Throughout this article, we have explored why ELT professionals need to build a personal brand and what the benefits of having one can be. In today's digital age, building a personal brand online is no longer a "nice to have". Actually, it's really important to work on it as it can influence the way others perceive you and the choice they can make as to whether to work with you or not. I've once seen this: "If you aren't on social media, you don't exist". I prefer to say that if you aren't on social media, you still exist, but potential students and employers don't

know how great your services are and how much you can help them.

So now it's over to you! It's the new year, so it's the perfect time to add personal branding to your New Year Resolutions list and embark on a new adventure that will result in more and better professional opportunities for years to come!

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Review: Mentoring Teachers: Supporting Wellbeing and Retention by Angi Malderez, Routledge (2024)

By Krishna Kumari Upadhayaya, Nepal

Angi Malderez' *Mentoring Teachers: Supporting Wellbeing and Retention* is a comprehensive guide in teacher mentoring, drawing on her extensive three-decade experience as a mentor, global advocate, and researcher. According to her, the content in the book is applicable not only to language teachers but also to teachers of any subject. Informed by her pivotal role in the Becoming a Teacher project, the book offers practical insights and scholarly depth, serving as a valuable resource for educators and researchers in the ever-evolving landscape of teacher education and development education.

As a language educator in Nepal, I appreciate Angi Malderez' *Mentoring Teachers* for its innovative insights, which are easily applicable to language teacher mentoring as well. Our shared commitment to clearly established goals, effective communication, and individualized support resonates with me. I must confess to the occasional missteps as a "judgementor" after having gone through her reasoning and how steps can be taken to avoid such an approach. Her emphasis on scaffolding aligns with my belief in transformative mentoring, which can contribute significantly to educators' development globally.

The book, organized into ten chapters, explores key aspects of effective mentoring: scaffolding, acculturation, modelling, sponsoring, and educating the mentee, the latter through Systematic Informed Reflective Practice (SIRP).

Chapter 1 introduces the Contextual Mentoring Audit (CMA) for mentors, inviting readers to evaluate their own context-related challenges, defining *context*, and exploring global variations in teaching programs and mentoring, emphasizing the need for clear definitions.

Chapter 2 focuses on the Support role in mentoring, emphasizing the vital mentor-mentee relationship, trust-building through informal chats, self-disclosure, and shared understanding. It highlights goal setting, openness, confidentiality, and non-judgmental support. The chapter outlines three levels of listening: *Attending*, *Accurate listening*, and *Empathic listening*, and introduces *Pure listening* as a further advanced skill, and briefly discusses the assistance mentors may provide within the Support role.

Chapter 3 guides mentors in helping mentees' integration into professional communities, emphasizing global to local connections. It encourages mentors to assess their affiliations, proposing mentee introductions to relevant communities. The chapter underscores mentor support in acculturation, requiring personal contributions to fulfil the Acculturator role.

Chapter 4 explores mentors modelling professionalism, discussing strategies, challenges, and approaches for mentoring teachers. It emphasizes observation, identification, attempts, and post-lesson reflection in teaching skill development. The chapter addresses the issue of inviting mentees into mentor classes, and emphasizes situations to avoid. It highlights fostering professional relationships for diverse teaching approaches. The chapter resonated with me due to shared experiences, like navigating new school dress codes and engaging in reflective practice during mentoring.

Chapter 5 explores the Sponsor role, emphasizing the use of power, specifically knowledge and contacts, for the mentee's benefit. A personal example illustrates Rod Bolitho's mentorship, showcasing how mentors can provide rich opportunities, educational resources, and how they can facilitate impactful projects. The chapter provides various examples of leveraging mentor power for mentee support, highlighting the transformative impact of sponsorship with a non-judgmental approach. It also addresses the challenge of using connections without fostering learned helplessness, while suggesting the introduction of mentees to influential contacts for network expansion.

Chapter 6 emphasizes the Educator role, highlighting mentorials' centrality in supporting classroom teaching and learning. It includes guidelines for both post-lesson mentorials using SIRP, and pre-lesson mentorials. The SIRP protocol in post-lesson mentorials follows five steps, aimed at developing mentees' noticing skills, theory-practice connections, and informed decision-making. Each step focuses on specific tasks, from describing lesson moments to planning future actions, and suggests that variations in contexts, as discussed in Chapter 1, influence the unfolding of the model implementation process. Pre-lesson sessions support mentees in effective lesson planning and self-preparation. Mentees explore "what if" scenarios for enhanced preparedness. Challenges for mentors emerge in guiding the mentee through each stage. Periodic reviews of teaching standards help mentees align their noticing data with explicit standards, aiding in self-assessment.

The chapter also discusses the model's conceptualization, underlining key concepts like feedback, and reflective practice. Additionally, it delves into mentoring challenges when time is limited and emphasizes the importance of preparing mentees for the less visible "preparation of self" phase. The Mentorial Record Sheet serves as evidence for management and reminders for mentors and mentees, summarizing mentorial discussions concisely. Lastly, various mentee activities are outlined to enhance learning, based on post-lesson discussions.

Chapter 7 navigates the dual role of mentors as assessors for mentees, addressing challenges and offering strategies. It emphasizes the importance of mentors aiding mentees in understanding assessment criteria without directly engaging in assessments. The chapter advocates for fostering mentee comfort with observers, guiding reflective post-lesson interactions, and managing differences in self-assessment to ensure effective mentoring amidst formal assessments.

Chapter 8 focuses on a mentor's continuous professional growth through Self-Initiated Reflective Practice (SIRP), emphasizing individual and collaborative learning. It highlights the delicate balance between mentor and mentee needs, stresses the mentor's evolving role, and integrates diverse mental approaches for effective mentoring. The chapter aims to enrich mentoring practices and cultivate an informed, supportive mentor community.

Chapter 9 centers on the significance of stories in mentor development, offering allegorical tales for reflection and a shift in mindset. It underscores the power of storytelling as a didactic tool, urging mentors to extract lessons from stories and apply them to their mentoring roles. Three stories — featuring a boy and a butterfly, Mummy Mouse and her babies, and desert nomads — highlight patience, observation, mentor roles, and the importance of examining ordinary things closely.

Chapter 10 emphasizes mentoring's role in supporting mentees and fostering a non-judgmental approach, addressing challenges faced by mentors across different teacher categories. It highlights contextual adjustments, insights for mentor-reader categories, and anecdotal accounts of mentoring's impact on personal and professional growth.

This book, with a focus on the Contextual Mentoring Audit (CMA), Systematic Informed Reflective Practice (SIRP), and a well-structured approach to mentoring, significantly enriched my mentoring practices. It provides a comprehensive framework by emphasizing five key aspects: scaffolding, acculturation, modelling, sponsoring, and educating. The insights into addressing context-related challenges, building trust, navigating professionalism, and managing the dual role of mentors as assessors are valuable additions. Overall, the book reaffirms my commitment to mentoring while introducing innovative approaches for effective mentorship.

The reviewer

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Green Wall activity: Ice-breaker for introduction to facilitator training workshop

By Jon Phillips, USA

Introduction

We used this initial Green Wall activity as an ice-breaker for an in-house introduction to facilitation workshop at the Faculty Development Division of the Defense Language Institute, Foreign Language Center in Monterey, CA. This activity gets participants thinking about what makes a good facilitator, and gives them the opportunity to get better acquainted with one another as teacher trainers and co-facilitators. The information gathered here can be built on in the follow-up workshop activities.

Objectives

- To help participants become better acquainted as co-facilitators.
- To stimulate thinking about what makes a good workshop facilitator.
- To provide a warm-up to an in-house Introduction to Facilitation workshop.

Audience / Level

- New faculty development trainers

Estimated Time

- 1 hour

Training Method

- Structured warm-up activity

Materials

- A large piece of green felt cloth
- Duct tape
- Adhesive spray
- 5 x 7 index cards
- Markers
- Flipcharts

1. Preparation

A. Before the participants enter the training room, hang the green felt cloth on the wall using the duct tape.

B. Spray the cloth all over with the adhesive spray. Check that you can stick an index card on the green cloth and it stays.

2. Overview

A. Introduce the objectives.

B. Overview: Prepare participants by asking them: "What makes a good facilitator?" Elicit a few brief responses and then give them the directions.

3. Give directions

A. Pass out three to five index cards to each participant.

B. Ask participants to work individually to write down three to five things they look for in a facilitator. They could be single words or short phrases. Each word or phrase will be put on a 5 x 7 card.

C. Invite participants to go to the green wall and post their cards.

D. The facilitator leads the group in sorting these characteristics into three categories (we used: *Knowing / Doing / Being*) on the green wall. We put each of the categories on large pink index cards and posted them on the top of the green wall. If the group of participants is smaller, they can work together at the green wall to look for things that are alike and move them under one of the categories. If the group is large, the facilitator can call out the word or phrase on each card, get participants' input, and then move the card under the category.

E. The facilitator devotes some time to whole group analysis, inviting participants to: 1) talk about why these things are/aren't important to them; 2) the relationship between knowing / doing / being in terms of the facilitator characteristics as generated.

F. Each participant group then selects six to eight words/phrases from the green wall and summarizes on flipchart their perspectives on what constitutes a capable, effective facilitator, as well as their roles in a short paragraph (four to five sentences).

G. Each group presents their perspectives.

Samples of words and phrases from participants defining an effective workshop facilitator on index cards posted to Green Wall

Samples of small group short paragraphs on what is an effective facilitator, using selected words and phrases from the green wall

1. An effective facilitator possesses skills in facilitation and a strong knowledge of the content. They motivate participants and respect everyone's ideas. When necessary, they intervene and ask questions to stimulate discussion. Additionally, they help to foster a collaborative environment.
2. An effective facilitator equipped with skills in facilitation and knowledge of the content, communicates effectively. They establish ground rules that enable them to deal with challenging participants. Their aim is to maintain a balanced and harmonious atmosphere throughout the session.
3. An effective facilitator possesses skills in facilitation and knowledge of the content. They have good listening skills. They create an inclusive environment that involves everyone. They also build on ideas. Moreover, they skilfully connect the ideas shared during the discussion, fostering a collaborative atmosphere.
4. An effective facilitator, equipped with skills in facilitation and knowledge of the content, can structure the session. They communicate clearly and can process participants' input. Moreover, they make learning points clear and ensure they meet the diverse needs of the group. This maximizes the learning experience.

Conclusion

Green Wall is a speedy process for brainstorming to generate a pool of ideas. All ideas are welcome. The rationale is to capitalize on the collective thinking of the group and build on each other's ideas. This activity worked well as an ice-breaker for our introduction to facilitation workshop, and provided a good lead in to the subsequent workshop activities.

The author

Jon Phillips is currently a senior faculty development specialist in the faculty development division of the largest foreign language institute in the world, and previously worked as a consultant in teacher education projects in the United States, Southeast Asia, Africa and the Middle East. He received his MAT in TESOL from the School for International Training.

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From the archive:
Do you believe in neuromyths?

By Carol Lethaby, USA and Patricia Harries, Canada

A Quiz

Before you go any further, you might want to try the quiz below. Read the statements and say whether you agree or disagree with them (or you can say 'don't know').

1. We mostly only use 10% of our brain.
2. Individual learners show preferences for the mode in which they receive information (e.g. visual, auditory, kinaesthetic).
3. Vigorous exercise can improve mental function.
4. Learning problems associated with developmental differences in brain function cannot be remediated by education.
5. Differences in hemispheric dominance (left brain, right brain) can help explain individual differences amongst learners.
6. Short bouts of co-ordination exercises can improve integration of left and right hemispheric brain function.
7. Individuals learn better when they receive information in their preferred learning style (e.g. visual, auditory, kinaesthetic).
8. Teaching to learning styles is more important in language learning than in other types of learning.
9. Extended rehearsal of some mental processes can change the shape and structure of some parts of the brain

These statements were part of a survey completed by 128 EL teachers in Canada and the USA in 2015. They are based on research by Paul Howard-Jones and his colleagues at the University of Bristol, UK and formed part of a larger study designed to see whether the beliefs teachers have about the brain and how it works are in fact correct or whether teachers believe in so-called 'neuromyths' (ideas about the brain that neuroscientists consider to be false).

Discussion of the quiz statements

Let's take a look at the statements above and what neuroscience says about them:

1. We mostly only use 10% of our brain.

False: This is an extremely pervasive neuromyth and has even been featured in a recent movie ('Lucy' from 2015). We do in fact use 100% of our brain. This has been verified by brain scans of healthy brains as well as studies done on people who have brain damage or who have lost limbs, studies which show the ability of the brain to adapt to damage and make use of unused brain matter (Jarrett, 2015).

Pervasive indeed! We found that 30% of the teachers in the study that we conducted believed in this neuromyth.

2. Individual learners show preferences for the mode in which they receive information (e.g. visual, auditory, kinaesthetic).

True: Learners do express preferences about how they like to learn, but they often get it wrong about how they think they learn best. Krätzig and Arbuthnott (2006) asked learners to identify their own preferred learning style and then used a standardized questionnaire to assess the learner's preferred style. They found less than 50% agreement between the self-report and the questionnaire.In our study, ninety-one per cent of the teachers agreed with this statement. Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic (VAK) learning preferences seem to have become a well-established idea in English language teaching.

3. Vigorous exercise can improve mental function.

True: Studies have proposed that the parts of the brain that control thinking and memory are greater in volume in people who exercise when compared with those people who don't. In addition, neuroscientists have known for many years that 'brain-derived neurotrophic factor' (BDNF) is released during aerobic exercise and this stimulates the growth of new neurons.

Eighty-three per cent of our survey respondents agreed with this statement.

4. Learning problems associated with developmental differences in brain function cannot be remediated by education.

False: This is a very important one for teachers. Cognitive neuroscience today "emphasise[s] the complexity of interrelation between biological systems and environments such as those provided by education, and highlight the enduring possibility of mitigation." In other words, teaching *does* make a difference! (Howard-Jones et al, 2009)

In our survey it was heartening that only 6% agreed with this statement, but that's still eight teachers who believe that brain differences are innate and aren't affected by education. Added to this, thirty-one of our teachers responded "Don't know" to this statement.

5. Differences in hemispheric dominance (left-brain, right-brain) can help explain individual differences amongst learners.

False: The idea that each hemisphere has a distinct and separate function i.e. the left hemisphere is for language and logical, analytical thinking and the right hemisphere for creativity, is not supported by neuroscientists. Various studies have shown that both hemispheres are used for processing both logical and creative tasks and a recent study of over a thousand people has shown that there is no evidence that some people have better connected or more dominant left or right brain networks (Jarrett, 2015). Categorising learners as either left or right brained, and focusing teaching on developing one hemisphere over another are not considered to be useful educational methods (Holmes, 2016).

This is another very common myth and sixty-six per cent of the teachers in our survey agreed with this statement.

6. Short bouts of co-ordination exercises can improve integration of left and right hemispheric brain function.

False: The belief that the two hemispheres of the brain are highly specialized and that learners learn in different ways according to whether one hemisphere dominates over another has led educators to seek interventions to improve learning. One theory from the 1930s which stated that reading problems were caused by an overly-dominant right hemisphere appears to have influenced a body of opinion (realized by a program called 'Brain Gym') that believes exercise can alter any so-called imbalance between the right and left hemispheres of the brain (Jarrett, 2015). However, this idea has no support in scientific reviews.Similar to statement 6, sixty-two per cent of the teachers surveyed agreed with this statement.

7. Individuals learn better when they receive information in their preferred learning style (e.g. visual, auditory, kinaesthetic).

False: This is considered to be "perhaps the most popular and influential myth" by Howard-Jones (2014) and to have achieved urban legend status in educational psychology (Lilienfeld in Hattie and Yates, 2015). The idea that learning is enhanced if learners are taught according to their preferred learning style, referred to as the meshing hypothesis by Pashler et al (2009), lacks supporting evidence and two studies in particular refute it. Krätzig and Arbuthnott (2006) found that learners learnt no better when tested using their preferred learning style (visual, auditory or kinaesthetic). Rogowsky et al (2015) examined the meshing hypothesis directly and the results showed no significant relationship between students' preferred learning styles, the teaching mode and test results.

Eighty-eight per cent of the survey participants agreed with this statement, showing what a firm hold it has on our profession.

8. Teaching to learning styles is more important in language learning than in other types of learning.

False: This was a statement that was not part of the original statements by Howard-Jones and his team, but was added to our study to find out whether EL teachers consider learning styles to be particularly relevant to language teaching.

In our study only 22% agreed with this, but this probably goes to show how important teachers think learning styles are to education in general, not specifically to language teaching.

9. Extended rehearsal of some mental processes can change the shape and structure of some parts of the brain

True: Good news! The brain's plasticity means that "thinking, learning and sensing can all change neural structure directly" (Fine, 2010: 177). Two well-known studies document this. In one study, (Draganski et al, 2004), the brains of volunteers who have learned to juggle were examined over three time periods using sophisticated brain imaging techniques. The brains showed temporary and structural change in areas connected with the processing and storage of complex visual motion. In 2000, Maguire et al looked at brain scans of London taxi drivers and observed that the structure of the brain changed as a result of the particular spatial navigation demands of the job.

Seventy per cent of the survey participants agreed with this statement – good news for teaching – practice does seem to make a difference.

How did you do?

So, how did you do? Which of the neuromyths did you agree with?

The point of our study was to show how many EL teachers believe in these widely dispersed myths and to consider the part that teacher trainers and educators play in propagating and perpetuating the myths.

To read the complete article* about our study and the studies that ours was based on, please see the references below. You might also like to take a look at Russ Mayne's 2012 article from Modern English Teacher.

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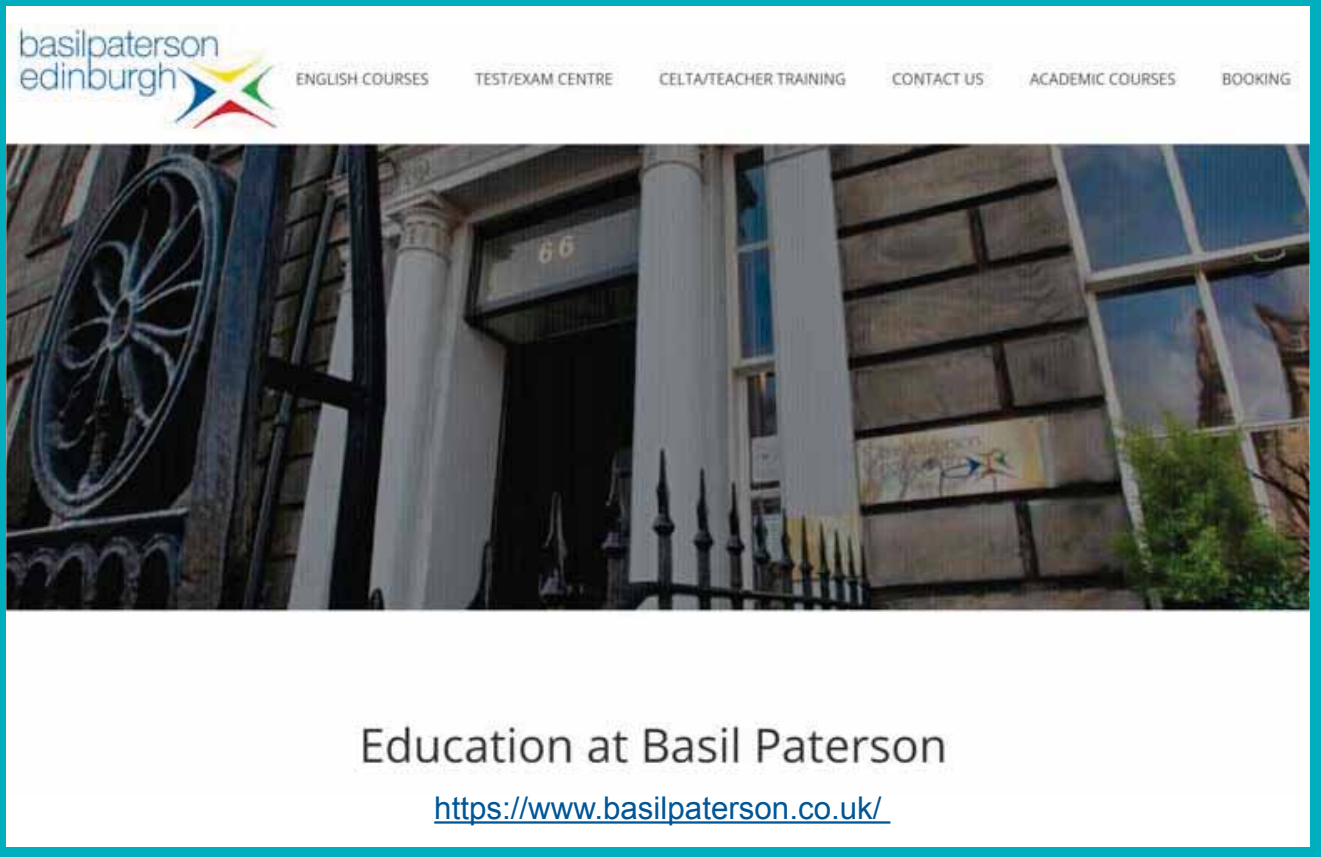


Pilgrims in Segovia Teacher Training courses 2024

PILGRIMS in SEGOVIA: Teacher Development Courses in Segovia, Summer 2024

Get inspired!

Come train with Pilgrims world-class trainers in Segovia this summer!

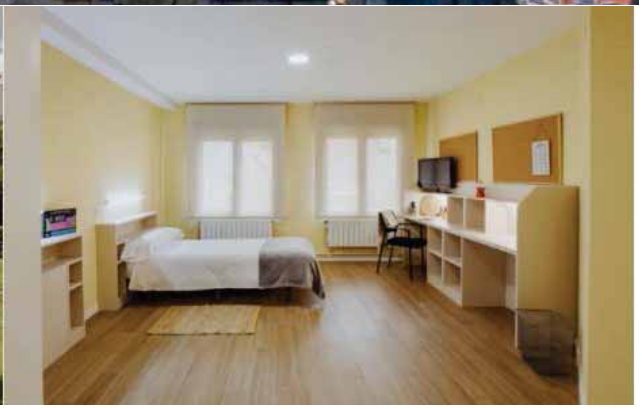
Teachers don't have an easy life: we know you're exhausted, we know you need and deserve a break, you need to get your batteries recharged, meet some people, share and learn some new and exciting ideas in a nice environment!

22,5 Training hours Monday through Friday, plus afternoon and evening events. Small group, large classrooms. Tuition Fees: €955

Accommodation €390 (residential, private bathroom, full board)

Click on the link below for full details of the courses currently offered. Our offer is subject to change.

https://www.pilgrims.co.uk/teacher-training-courses/pilgrims-in-segovia



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Trainer Training

Training around the World