

SPECIAL FOCUS: Artificial Intelligence

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE LEARNING WORLD

ELT's way forward

EXPANDING ELT BOUNDARIES

When ELT no longer means classroom careers: **Dan Shepherd** and **George Chilton** share their trajectories.

AI'S NEW ROLE

ELT professionals **Peter Lucantoni**, **Mark Frohnsdorff**, **Sarah Ultsch** consider what AI means for us now.

SUMMER READING

Is **Silvana Richardson's** *Promoting Professional Learning* worth the read? **Wayne Trotman** thinks so.

INTERNATIONAL INSIGHT

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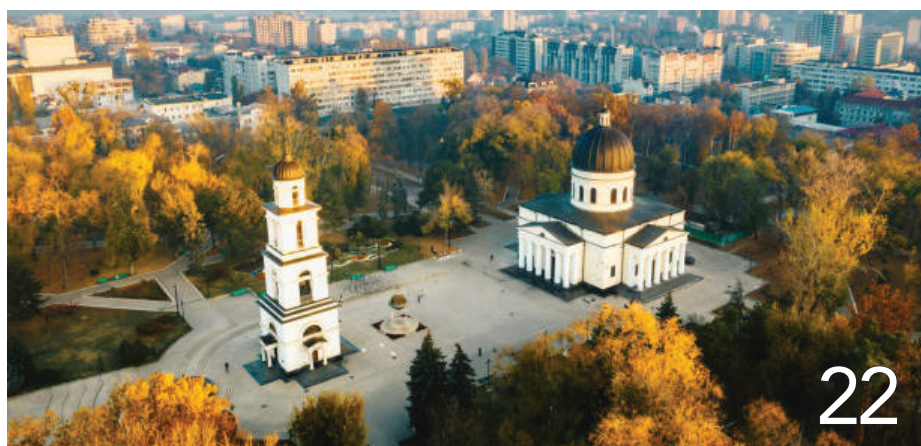
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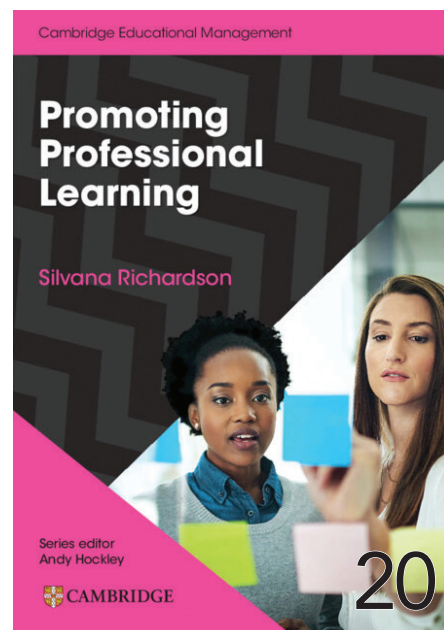
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“This title is a superb addition to the Cambridge series on educational management, and I strongly recommend administrators in all forms and at all levels of ELT take a very good look at it.”

coming up next issue

■ **Special focus:** School Rankings

Front cover photography credit: [Anna Frame](#).

Welcome to the July/August issue of *EL Gazette*

Welcome to the 501st edition of *EL Gazette*. It is a privilege to introduce myself as the magazine's desk editor. Since 1978, *EL Gazette* has produced impactful news, reports and stories from across the globe. As we look ahead to the next 500 editions, my aim is to uphold the longstanding quality and traditions of *EL Gazette* whilst embracing the innovations arising in the English language teaching profession. It is rather fitting, then, that this issue focuses on one of the most groundbreaking technological advancements of the century, addressing the question: 'How does Artificial Intelligence fit into the education profession?'

This issue brings insight into two Hounslow schools, Alexandra Primary School and Chatsworth Primary School. Having spoken to headteachers **John Norton** and **Helen Willis** myself, I can confidently assure you that their approaches to AI are worth the venture to page 5.

Bringing you a new perspective on career paths for ELT teachers, **Fabio Cerpelloni** chats with the founders of Hubbub Labs. Starting from page 6, **Dan Shepherd** and **George Chilton** discuss how their classroom experience has led to business success whilst remaining involved in the ELT profession.

Fabio Cerpelloni shares a personal experience with AI, encouraging reflection amongst students and teachers alike on page 10.

With AI's swift accession from concept to concern to classroom tool, it is crucial that we take the time to understand what ELT's future looks like with AI. On page 11, **Peter Lucantoni** and the team at Cambridge University Press & Assessment suggest an enlightened way forward for teachers.

On page 14, **Mark Frohnsdorff** continues the conversation on how teachers should be using AI, taking care to outline the issue of bias. In a world where almost any teaching material can be generated with just the touch of a keyboard, Mark's insights are particularly useful for educators.

Sarah Ultsch, the Product Strategy Director at Oxford University Press, advocates for pedagogical approaches to AI. Concluding with the belief that learners and educators should be at the centre of our future, Sarah's findings begin on page 17.

For those of you looking for your next educational read, **Wayne Trotman** reviews *Promoting Professional Learning* by **Silvana Richardson**. Richardson's book was published earlier this year, is available to purchase at the Cambridge University Press Bookshop and is expertly evaluated on page 20.

If you're wondering what to do with your ELT qualifications or simply have a desire to dine under the Eastern European sun, flip your magazine to page 21 to discover **Wayne Trotman**'s findings on the ELT profession in Moldova.

EL Gazette's next issue on **School Rankings** is one you won't want to miss. In October, you can expect to find the names of the top 100 schools as ranked by English UK, accompanied by all the essential information and analysis needed.

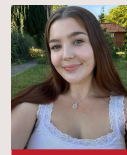
Happy reading!

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Inside two Hounslow schools: AI learning

EL Gazette's publisher Ian Carter and desk editor Matilda Hatton discuss AI learning with two Hounslow schools.

It is no secret that AI's role and visibility in education is rapidly increasing. While debate continues to exist on its place in the classroom, two Hounslow primary schools have already decided their way forward. Alexandra Primary School and Chatsworth Primary School recently spoke to *EL Gazette* about their findings. Both schools serve highly diverse and multicultural communities. Alexandra Primary School has 660 pupils, 98% of whom speak English as an additional language. At Chatsworth Primary school, roughly 80% of students speak EAL and more than 40 languages are spoken by pupils and families. As a result, reading and writing pose a difficult challenge for many of the students. For both schools, “developing vocabulary, sentence structure and language confidence is essential for success across the curriculum.” Ahead of an in-depth feature, this preview takes a first look at how and why these two schools have implemented AI.

Both schools use the AI-powered education programme Writer's Toolbox to teach pupils and track their learning. Since its introduction, Alexandra Primary School has achieved a 5–7% improvement in writing outcome. Meanwhile, Chatsworth Primary School has seen a 5% increase in the proportion of pupils reaching the expected writing standard. The platform combines structured writing activities for students with diagnostic features for teachers, enabling them to monitor progress for individuals and cohorts. John Norton, the headteacher of Alexandra Primary School, stresses the value of Writer's Toolbox for teachers, saying “If you're going to do a report, you use toolbox to do it.”

“There's an AI element that helps to develop their writing in a very safe environment.” - John Norton

John believes that the significance of writing extends beyond producing accurate pieces of schoolwork. John claims writing “is a way for children to think, communicate and express themselves confidently.”

One key focus at Alexandra Primary School is “sentence automaticity”. By explicitly teaching specific



sentence types, writing becomes automatic and the cognitive load is reduced for children. John thinks that this will lead to increased creativity, as pupils will have more opportunity to spend their mental energy on developing ideas rather than sentence structures.

The headteacher of Chatsworth Primary School, Helen Willis, notes that school budget reductions have led to little classroom support. When used appropriately, Helen believes that AI platforms can help bridge the gap between student and teacher. Teachers are pleased with Writer's Toolbox's ability to provide immediate feedback to students, which enables them to focus on small groups during lesson time.

“The children are still able to make progress even though the teacher isn't able to focus on every single child in every single lesson.” - Helen Willis

Importantly, both headteachers are clear that AI platforms are intended to support lessons, not supersede them. As Helen puts it, “There is still a place for knowing how to put a pen to a piece of paper, so it's an additional tool that teachers are using rather than a replacement.”

The experiences of Alexandra and Chatsworth Primary Schools offer an insight into how AI is being integrated into everyday classroom practice. Whilst these early results are encouraging, the findings are based on just 12 months of use. *EL Gazette* looks forward to returning to this story once more long-term data emerges.

How two teachers built a business beyond the classroom

In this exclusive interview, Fabio Cerpelloni speaks with Hubbub Labs' two founders.



Dan Shepherd and George Chilton have an inspiring professional development story. They are two English teachers who moved out of the classroom to found Hubbub Labs, an education marketing agency that is trusted by the world's best education brands. Fabio Cerpelloni met them to hear that story first-hand.

Fabio Cerpelloni: What's Hubbub Labs and how was it born?

Dan Shepherd: We like to define Hubbub Labs as “the education marketing agency where strategy meets creative spark.” We support education companies with strategy,

Because of our lived experience in the classroom, we then decided to niche into the ELT teaching, learning, and assessment area.

It came natural to us to help education companies with their marketing. And, well, here we are today.

campaigns and content that helps them connect with their students and professional partners.

Our agency grew out of our own ELT backgrounds. George and I first met at Oxford House in Barcelona in 2010, when he was teaching and doing some teacher training, and I was doing my Trinity Cert. TESOL course. We became friends and taught together for a few years.

I then moved into coordination, became Director of Studies, and worked as a speaking examiner and team leader for Exams Catalunya. George moved into blogging, editing, and then PR and marketing. He started to work with education companies, startups, and international clients.



Later, we were both looking for a new challenge. George suggested starting our own thing. We'd built solid connections at that point and ended up collaborating with another agency that was called ELT Jam at the time.

Fabio Cerpelloni: What was the hardest part of leaving, or partly leaving, the ELT classroom behind?

George Chilton: When I was in the classroom, I was always feeling like, I enjoy my job, but I shouldn't be teaching. I should be working in marketing or something along these lines. I knew I was good at copywriting and marketing, but I didn't know how to get into it. I felt stuck.

What helped me get unstuck was deciding to take matters into my own hands. So, I started a blog (DesignerLessons.org), which did quite well.

Dan Shepherd: It won the British Council Blog Award!

George Chilton: It did. It was getting something like 20,000 views a month, which helped me get noticed by a few people. Thanks to that, I also got to speak at events like TESOL Spain, and I eventually got picked up by Pearson. They saw the blog and offered me a job as an editorial assistant for Wall Street English (Wall Street Institute at the time), which I accepted.

Transitioning from the classroom to the office was difficult for me. I went from this peripatetic teaching role across Barcelona to sitting in an office nine hours a day. I missed the variety that my teaching role offered. I taught teenagers, kids, corporate students, general English courses, exam classes—the whole range. And then suddenly I was in an office doing the same thing all the time. It was really hard on me.

Fabio Cerpelloni: What was the transition like for you, Dan?

Dan Shepherd: I transitioned a bit more slowly. When I became Director of Studies, I was still involved in teaching. I covered classes and met parents and teachers, so I was still very much in the teaching world. Similar to George, the biggest thing I missed was the people. I liked being with people and the energy they bring within a school. Being sat down all day was a challenge for me as well.

Fabio Cerpelloni: When teachers think about professional development, they often imagine qualifications, conferences or teacher training positions. Should we broaden that idea?

Dan Shepherd: Maybe we should, but all of those things helped me get to where I was. Doing the Trinity Diploma helped me get the job as Director of Studies. Becoming Director of Studies, organising events, and going to conferences helped me build a small network,

INTERVIEW •

which got us some of our first ELT clients. Examining also helped me. I'm still very much interested in English language assessment, and at Hubbub Labs we've worked with lots of assessment companies.

George Chilton: Let me add that you never know what doing something or learning something will lead to. You can only work it out backwards. You can say, "I did that, which let me do this, which let me do that." You can join the dots backwards. But you can never know, for example, what learning a new language is going to do for you. If you take a qualification, you don't know what door it will open. It's a complete mystery. If you sit there and think, "Maybe I should..." and you don't do it, you'll never get anywhere. You actually have to do something. It might not lead to something you want, but at least you can try and see what happens.

Fabio Cerpelloni: Do you think teachers are generally aware of how transferable their skills are outside the classroom?

Dan Shepherd: I don't think I was aware of it until I started doing something else. Then I realised that the reason it came naturally to me was because I had that classroom experience.

I was never a natural teacher. In my first few classes, I hated standing in front of the class, and I used to spend more time planning the class than the length of the class itself. But over time, you develop the ability to communicate clearly, manage expectations, and present information in the clearest way possible. I now find those



skills are essential in running an agency, working with clients, and managing teams.

When we deliver marketing strategy workshops, people with only corporate experience sometimes expect very dry, long, boring sessions. But we bring in our ELT experience and make them fun and interactive. People come out feeling they've got something from it, but also that they've enjoyed the experience.

I'm not teaching English, but I find that my ELT skills have helped me in my expedition supervisor role. So, I'd encourage English teachers to find something they are passionate about and then think about how they can use their ELT skills to turn their passion into a more full-time role.

Also, five years ago I trained as a mountain guide, and now I support international schools with the Duke of Edinburgh programs. I teach kids how to read a map, how to use a compass—that sort of thing. Then I go with them on the routes to supervise and make sure they're safe.

George Chilton: Teachers tend to be very good listeners. I don't want to overgeneralise, but teachers are often good at observing what people are saying and doing. They are good at understanding needs and performing needs analysis.

Teachers also tend to be creative because you need to take what's in the book and make it come to life. They have critical thinking skills. They need to understand what works for the students, what doesn't, what they should do next, how to manage a mixed-level group, and how to manage people from different cultures in the same room. That is huge.

If you've got the right attitude, you want to learn, and you're willing to stretch yourself, you can take those skills into another company and learn what they're doing there. You could be a brilliant employee, or you could be good as an entrepreneur because you've got those people skills.

One phrase I've always gone by is: start before you're ready. The reason you need to start before you're ready is that you never feel ready. "Ready" isn't a feeling; it's a decision.

Fabio Cerpelloni: What would you say to a teacher who feels they have "only taught English" and has nothing else to offer?

George Chilton: Make yourself stand out. Anything you think you're good at, or want to get into, do it. Create videos, create a portfolio, start doing some design work.

Dan Shepherd: And you don't need to be an absolute expert either. You just need to know a little bit more than the other person, and they will still see you as a person of reference.

George Chilton: I also think teachers don't tend to like being self-promotional. They're often quite modest. But you don't need to be overly self-promotional. Showing rather than telling is the way to go about it. Write the article. Show people what you can do. People will notice you. Then, if you want to knock on some doors, you've got the evidence.

Fabio Cerpelloni: What would you like teachers reading this interview to feel more confident about after hearing your story?

Dan Shepherd: Treat everything as a learning opportunity. Not everything is going to change your life, but small, incremental things can build up.

I started doing coordination. I wouldn't have become Director of Studies if I hadn't done that. I don't think I would have had the confidence to start a company and manage people if I hadn't had that management experience in the school.

So, go into things with an open mind, be positive, and think about what you can take with you to the next stage.

George Chilton: Do it if you want to do it. You can do it. If you've got a goal, something at the top of the mountain, you will get there if you're persistent. There are multiple routes. Some

routes have dead ends, and you have to go up other ways. The way to get up the mountain is to be persistent and find your way up. It's tough. You're going to be out of breath. It's going to get cold. You're going to run out of food sometimes. But once you get there, it'll be worth it.



Dan Shepherd has over 15 years' experience in ELT and assessment. His roles have spanned teacher, speaking examiner, Director of Studies and agency founder. He is currently Managing Director at [Hubbub Labs](#), and is also a trained mountain guide and founder of [Outdoor Adventures BCN](#).



Fabio Cerpelloni is a learner of English turned ELT specialist, content writer, and editor for education brands. He holds an MA in Professional Development for Language Education and has worked with major English language schools, publishers, high-traffic language-learning blogs, and education platforms. If you send him an email, he'll reply. www.fabiocerpelloni.com.



George Chilton has spent the past nineteen years living in Asia, Europe and Latin America. He's the co-founder and Creative Managing Director at [Hubbub Labs](#), an education marketing agency. As a former ESL teacher, he cannot escape the classroom – and now also lectures on marketing and brand storytelling at business schools.

Going faster in the right direction

Fabio Cerpelloni reflects on his student's use of AI.



A few weeks ago, my colleague and I were testing an intermediate learner of English on Zoom. It was an end-of-the-course speaking test. Clara (not her real name) was answering my colleague's questions about hobbies, dream jobs, and other typical "B1" topics, while I was there as the second examiner with my camera off.

A couple of minutes into the test, I noticed something strange: Clara always waited a few seconds before giving her answers, and I could also hear a voice coming from somewhere in her room. She would answer every question only when this voice faded away. At first, I thought she had the radio on, but then what was happening became clear to me.

"I think she's using AI. Put on your earphones and you'll see what I mean," I wrote to my colleague in the chat box.

Clara was using generative AI to cheat. We caught her.

"Clara, why? Why did you do this?" I asked.

"Because I didn't want to fail this exam. I was anxious and afraid. I just wanted to do well," she said weeping.

We could have failed her on the spot, but instead decided to give her a second chance.

"You'll need to come to the campus and take the speaking exam face to face."

She retook the test and passed it.

On the surface, this story tells me that AI disrupts the education system by encouraging students to cheat. But if I look closer, this event taught me a more useful lesson.

It reminded me that I should have an open conversation with my students about the use of AI. How do they use it? What do they think AI is for? Do they know what they

could do with it to improve their language skills? I can't afford to leave the learners to their own devices. And if I don't train them, I shouldn't be surprised when they use technology as a shortcut.

Teachers shouldn't be left to their own devices either. In [Issue 494 of EL Gazette](#), Sophia Mavridi, a senior lecturer in educational technology and TESOL, pointed out that "we often place the responsibility on the teacher. We say it's the teacher's job to integrate innovation and educate students on how to use technology responsibly. But who's educating the teachers? Are they being prepared for this?"

Institutions, Clara, you, and I are all in this together.

If we're lucky enough to have access to this wonderful tool that can help us go faster, we must make sure we're going faster in the right direction.

Keeping AI real in the ELT classroom: Three principles for teacher development

The Professional Learning and Development team (Peter Lucantoni, Charles Stewart and Ben Herbert) at Cambridge University Press & Assessment reflect on the rise of AI in classrooms and propose a way forward for teachers.



As the Professional Learning and Development team at Cambridge University Press & Assessment, we deliver training to English language teachers across a wide range of educational contexts, including the Middle East, Türkiye, North Africa, Central Africa, and Central and Eastern Europe. Over the past 18 months, we have seen a significant increase in teachers' interest in generative AI and its implications for language education.

During this time, we have delivered numerous training sessions on AI, ranging from introductory workshops to more specialised topics such as supporting academic writing and developing learners' vocabulary through AI tools.

Throughout this work, we have been guided by the belief that AI can help teachers “empower learners to adapt and thrive in the new era of GenAI, making the education of the learners of today and tomorrow dramatically more equitable and enriching” (Galaczi & Luckin, 2024).

Moving Beyond AI for Lesson Planning

Our experience suggests that we are broadly in agreement with the article *Keeping it real in the classroom* published in Issue 500 of *EL Gazette*. In many of the contexts in which we work, teachers' understanding of AI has developed considerably. Many are now comfortable using AI to support lesson planning and materials creation.

The next stage of professional development, however, is helping teachers integrate AI meaningfully into classroom practice in ways that enhance learning rather than simply improve efficiency. Equally important is supporting teachers in helping learners use AI responsibly, ethically and autonomously.

SPECIAL FEATURE: AI FOCUS •

Addressing Teachers' Concerns

As Hockly (2024) observes, “The appearance of tools like ChatGPT brought the potential benefits and challenges of generative AI into sharp focus for educators.” We believe this is especially true when AI moves from teachers’ planning into learners’ hands.

Research conducted by Cambridge in 2024 identified several concerns frequently raised by teachers, including cheating and plagiarism, misinformation and blurred boundaries between fact and fiction, inappropriate language levels in AI-generated output, reduced critical thinking, unequal access to technology, the need for effective prompting skills, inconsistent institutional policies, and issues relating to ethics and data privacy (Khabbazzbashi et al., 2024).

Three Principles for Classroom Use

In response to these concerns, we have developed three practical principles that now underpin our AI training sessions.

1. Learners should always evaluate AI output

Whenever AI is used in the classroom, its output should become the object of critical analysis rather than being



accepted uncritically. This creates opportunities for learners to develop critical thinking alongside their language skills.

For example, a teacher might ask an AI chatbot to generate five ideas for a writing task. Learners then select the three ideas they consider most useful, justify their choices in small groups, and further develop those ideas before beginning to write. In this way, AI becomes the

starting point for discussion and evaluation rather than a replacement for learners’ own thinking.

2. Reflection should be built into every AI-supported task

Teachers should also include structured reflection whenever learners use AI. Reflection encourages learners to evaluate both the effectiveness of AI and the role it played in supporting their learning.

Following the writing task described above, learners might discuss how useful the AI-generated ideas were, whether the suggestions genuinely helped them complete the task, and which strategies they used to adapt or improve the ideas. Such discussions also provide opportunities to explore ethical issues and to consider how AI might support independent language learning beyond the classroom.



3. AI support should gradually decrease

When AI is used to support productive skills such as writing or speaking, learners should be encouraged to reflect on how much support they actually need.

As their confidence and competence develop, teachers should gradually reduce the level of AI support provided.

This process helps learners become more aware of their own learning while reinforcing the idea that AI is one resource among many. Used in this way, AI supports learner autonomy rather than creating dependency.

Looking Ahead

Generative AI continues to reshape teachers' professional lives, and opinions about its place in education remain divided among teachers, institutions and ministries

of education. Nevertheless, the consistently positive response we have received during our training programmes suggests that many teachers are eager to move beyond simply learning about AI towards developing the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to use it thoughtfully in the classroom.

Ultimately, the challenge is no longer whether AI should have a place in language education, but how teachers can use it in ways that promote deeper learning, critical thinking and greater learner autonomy.

Further Reading

If you would like to read more about *Generative AI and Language Education: Opportunities, Challenges and the Need for Critical Perspectives*, please click [here](#) to access Cambridge University Press & Assessment's PDF. You can also learn more about authors, [Dr. Evelina Galaczi](#) and [Rose Luckin](#), by clicking on their names.

If you would like to read more about *Nicky Hockly's 30 Essentials for Using Artificial Intelligence*, please click [here](#) to access Cambridge University Press

& Assessment's PDF. The book can also be bought directly from the [Cambridge University Press Bookshop](#). You can also learn more about the author, [Nicky Hockly](#), by clicking on her name.

If you would like to read more about *Exploring the Impact of Generative AI on Language Education: Insights from Teachers*, please click [here](#) to access Cambridge University Press & Assessment's PDF. You can also learn more about the author, [Nahal Khabbazbashi](#), by clicking on her name.

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Biased towards good practice? Hidden defaults in AI-generated ELT materials

How can teachers trust AI to deliver accurate lesson plans?

Mark Frohnsdorff explains.



A I is quickly becoming part of ELT materials development. Teachers are using it to create texts, worksheets, role plays, questions, vocabulary activities, lesson plans, and assessment tasks.

Most teachers now know that AI can hallucinate. It can invent facts or sources. But there is another risk that is easy to overlook. AI-generated materials may not fail because they are obviously poor. They may fail because they look professionally plausible.

AI does not only make materials quickly. It makes assumptions quickly. When a teacher gives a brief, the model fills the gaps. In ELT, this matters because some versions of “good practice” are

highly visible in our professional discourse. Communicative tasks, pair work, learner-centred stages, reduced teacher talk, reflection, and engagement appear again and again in teacher training, coursebooks, lesson templates, and published materials.

I cannot know exactly what any particular model has learned from. But if AI systems reproduce patterns from public and professional text, it is not surprising

The danger is not only what AI gets wrong. It is what it gets plausibly right.

that they may also reproduce familiar ELT patterns. In my own AI-assisted materials development, I have seen this pull clearly. The model often moves towards a recognisable communicative, learner-centred lesson shape, even when the learning problem needs something more specific.

In this article, I use the word “bias” in a professional sense. Here, I am not talking about hallucination, factual error, or wider public debates around AI bias. I mean methodological bias: the default scripts, assumptions and professional habits that shape AI-generated lesson materials.

These defaults are not necessarily bad. Pair work can be useful. Learner-centred teaching can be powerful.

Reflection can deepen learning. Discussion can create meaningful language use. Good practice becomes risky when it stops being a decision and becomes a reflex.

The question is not
“Is this good practice?”
The better question is:
why this practice,
for these learners,
in this context, for this
purpose, at this point?

Six defaults to notice

The defaults I have often noticed cluster around a familiar image of the good ELT lesson: interactive, learner-centred, engaging, lightly teacher-led, neatly staged, and not always strongly tied to individual evidence of learning.

Taken together, these defaults show a pattern. Learners interact. The teacher facilitates. The lesson moves through recognisable stages. Engagement is visible. Context is generalised. Evidence of individual learning may remain light.

Pair work may be right when learners need rehearsal, confidence,

or interaction. But it may be wrong when the teacher needs to see what each learner can do alone. Teacher talk may be unhelpful when it becomes long or unclear. But it may be essential when learners need modelling, explanation, feedback, or guided noticing.

The same is true of engagement. A lively task is not always a learning task. A discussion is not always deep thinking. A reflection question at the end of a lesson is not the same as teaching metacognition. The defaults are hard to see because they often look like good practice.

Design drift

There is a second problem too. I think of it as design drift.

Design drift happens when a long AI-assisted planning conversation follows one useful insight so far that the original learning aim becomes weaker or partly disappears.

I noticed this while developing ESP materials. The original focus was vocabulary development around verbs in training objectives, such as *identify*, *describe*, *compare*, *explain*, and *evaluate*. At first, the problem seemed to be vocabulary precision. Learners needed to understand what these verbs meant in course objectives.

But a deeper issue emerged. Vocabulary knowledge alone was not enough. Learners also needed metacognition. They needed to ask: What is this objective asking me to do? How demanding is it? What evidence would show that I have met it?

That was useful. But then the AI-assisted design moved too far in that direction. By the end, the metacognitive element had grown, and the original vocabulary focus had weakened. The AI did not fail by producing nonsense. It failed by being helpful in one direction for too long.

AI can help us think and see gaps. But if we do not keep returning to the learning problem, the design can drift. The lesson can become more sophisticated and less focused at the same time.

Contextual fit, not automatic best practice

This is not an argument against communicative teaching, learner-centredness, pair work, or reflection. It is an argument against automatic best practice.

Best practice becomes best only when it fits. Why this task? Why this interaction pattern? Why this amount of teacher support? Why this evidence of learning? Why now?

This matters especially when AI draws on familiar ELT patterns. A communicative lesson shape may be useful. A learner-centred stage may be useful. A reflection task may be useful. But the teacher must ask whether the model has selected them because they fit the learning problem, or because they are common in the kind of ELT text the model can reproduce.

Context matters here, but context does not mean crude cultural matching. A lesson is not unsuitable

Possible default	What it may look like	Teacher question
Communicative interaction	Pair work, group work, role play, discussion, peer checking	Does this task need interaction, or individual evidence?
Learner-centredness	Teacher as facilitator, reduced teacher talk, discovery, autonomy assumed	Do learners need discovery, or modelling and guided practice?
Generic lesson shape	Lead-in, text, questions, practice, production, reflection	Has the model imposed a familiar lesson template?
Engagement	Variety, fun, participation, “make it interactive”	Is activity being mistaken for learning?
Context-flattening	Generic ELT assumptions, or surface-level localisation	Does this fit the real purpose, constraints, and specific learners?
Evidence-light design	Vague outcomes, weak assessment link, unclear individual output	What proves each learner has learned?

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simply because it contains unfamiliar references. It is not suitable simply because it uses local names, places, or examples. Learners can understand, enjoy, and compare unfamiliar practices and cultures.

The more useful idea is contextual fit. Does the task fit the learning purpose? Does it fit the learners' current knowledge? Does it fit the classroom conditions, resources, time, assessment demands, and required learning behaviour? AI may produce a polished lesson, but the teacher must decide whether it fits.

A practical response: NOTICE

Teachers do not need to reject AI-generated materials. They need a way to manage the AI-assisted design process. One simple acronym is **NOTICE**.

N — Name the learning problem and design values

Tell the AI what learners must be able to do, what pedagogy you want to see, and what risks to avoid. Negative prompting helps: "Do not default to pair work unless it clearly supports the learning aim."

O — Observe the AI defaults

Ask the model to help: "List the assumptions you made in this lesson plan." Then compare those assumptions with your context, aim, and values.

T — Test for individual evidence

AI often creates visible activity. Check where each learner shows learning alone, not only through pair or group work.

I — Inspect contextual fit and useful friction

Check whether the material fits your real class. Also check whether AI has removed useful difficulty, such as retrieval effort, careful



discrimination, technical precision, or individual accountability.

C — Check for design drift

Compare the final lesson with the original aim. Has one useful idea taken over? Has vocabulary become metacognition, fluency become discussion, or assessment become reflection?

E — Edit with control

Do not let a small edit become a full redesign. Use version numbers. Protect what must stay. Specify the size of the change: minimal edit, moderate revision, or redesign. Ask the model to explain exactly what it changed and why.

Teachers do not need perfect clarity at the start. They can begin with a rough idea or vague concern. The key is to ask the AI to help clarify before it generates materials. For example: "Ask me five questions about the learning problem before you design the lesson."

Professional articulation literacy

This may be one of the most important AI skills for teachers. It is not only prompt writing. It is professional articulation literacy: the ability to notice, name, question and specify the values and assumptions that should shape AI-generated materials.

If teachers cannot articulate what they value, the model will fill the gap. It will decide what good practice looks like. It will decide how much pair work to use, how much teacher support to include, what kind of learner autonomy to assume, and what counts as evidence of learning.

AI can become useful not because it gives perfect answers, but because it reveals the questions teachers need to ask themselves. In that sense, AI literacy is not only technical. It asks us to say what good teaching means here, for these learners, for this purpose, and with this evidence of learning.



Mark Frohnsdorff works in professional training contexts where language functions as a performance and safety tool. His interests span classroom practice, vocabulary development, and evidence-informed course and task design, with a focus on how learners perform under cognitive and communicative pressure.

AI in English language teaching: Focusing on what matters most

Read on to learn about the attitude towards AI at Oxford University Press.

In English Language Teaching the conversation around AI has evolved rapidly. What began as curiosity about AI's capabilities has quickly become a practical discussion about how it can support teaching, learning, and assessment.

From recent research that we conducted with our global community of over 4,000 English Language Teaching professionals, we know that over 80% are experimenting with AI, using it for tasks such as assisted lesson planning, and the creation of activities and tests. Learners are using generative AI tools to practise language skills and receive feedback beyond the classroom. Across the sector, organisations are exploring how AI can help create more personalised and responsive learning experiences.

Yet amidst the excitement, an important question remains: how do we ensure AI improves learning rather than simply introducing new technology into education? For the team at Oxford University Press this has become the defining question.

The most meaningful innovations are those that deliver better learning outcomes, support teachers, and expand access to high-quality education. Technology itself is not the goal. Better learning is the goal.

This is particularly true in language education. Language acquisition is built on practice, feedback, communication, and progression. As any English Language teacher knows, providing



personalised support at scale has always been challenging. AI has the potential to help learners access more opportunities to practice, receive feedback, and build confidence, both inside and outside the classroom.

At the same time, AI presents real challenges. Large language models can be remarkably effective at some educational tasks, yet much less reliable when context, professional judgement, or human understanding are required. Their value in education will depend not on how advanced the technology becomes, but on how effectively it is integrated into sound pedagogy,

robust assessment, and trusted learning experiences.

If AI is going to enhance language learning, it must be guided by pedagogy, measured against educational outcomes, and governed responsibly.

Pedagogy must lead technology

At Oxford University Press, our approach to AI begins with pedagogy rather than technology. Rather than asking where AI can be inserted into a product, we start by identifying learner and teacher needs. We then explore whether AI can help address

those needs in a way that is educationally meaningful. Every AI capability that we put through our product innovation process must demonstrate a clear pedagogical purpose and set of outcomes.

This means AI should not feel separate from the learning experience. It should be embedded within learning journeys, appropriately scaffolded and aligned with clearly defined learning outcomes. The technology should support learning, not distract from it.

This principle becomes increasingly important as general-purpose AI tools become more widely available. While these systems can generate impressive content, successful language learning depends on much more than content generation. We consider that experiences such as English language speaking practice should be aligned to CEFR learning objectives. They should be designed to recognise and respond effectively to learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds and across different stages of English language proficiency, sensitive to age and context, supported by evidence-based feedback, and integrated within a carefully designed pedagogical journey that builds confidence, communicative competence, and measurable language progression.

Our research has also repeatedly reinforced the importance of keeping teachers at the centre of the experience. AI can support educators by reducing administrative workload, generating additional practice opportunities, and helping identify where learners need support. However, the most effective role for AI is to augment professional expertise rather than replace it. The future of language

learning is teachers and AI working together to create better learning experiences.

But if pedagogy is going to guide how AI is used in education, another question follows: how do we know whether an AI tool is actually supporting effective learning?

Measuring what matters

One of the challenges facing education today is that most AI models are evaluated using benchmarks designed to assess reasoning, coding, mathematics, or knowledge retrieval. While useful, these measures tell us relatively little about how well an AI system performs in authentic educational contexts.

That matters because benchmarks shape the future of AI. They influence what researchers measure, what technology companies optimise for, and ultimately, what capabilities become prioritised.

This was one of the motivations behind L2-Bench, which OUP has developed in partnership with researchers from the University of Oxford.

L2-Bench is the first comprehensive benchmark, to our knowledge, specifically designed to evaluate large language models in second-language education. It includes more than 1,000 authentic teaching tasks, a framework of 12 core teaching competencies and 31 sub-skills, a structured scoring methodology, and validation from more than 200 experienced educators across 45 countries. It was designed to evaluate AI against the realities of language teaching rather than generic measures of technical performance.

The findings have been revealing. Across the benchmark, leading models performed strongly

on structured tasks such as lesson planning and activity design. However, performance became less consistent in areas requiring professional judgement, contextual awareness, and socio-emotional understanding.

We also found that context matters more than many people assume. Models often performed less effectively when tasks involved younger learners, lower proficiency learners, or more resource-constrained educational environments. In many cases, the general-purpose AI tools assumed that access to technology and abundant learning resources were a given, and we know that this does not reflect the classroom and teaching realities of institutions around the world.

These findings reinforce an important lesson: educational quality cannot be reduced to a single AI score. The real question is not whether a model is “good” or “bad”, but where it performs well, where it struggles, and how it can be used responsibly including recognising when the best choice is not to use AI at all.

For OUP, L2-Bench has become an important tool for assessing the AI technologies we choose to build into our own products and services. More broadly, it represents an important step towards establishing shared standards for evaluating AI in language education. Because if we want AI to improve learning, we first need to ensure that it has educational impact and that we are measuring the right things.

AI systems still need strong educational expertise behind them

As AI becomes more deeply embedded in teaching, learning

and assessment, questions of trust become just as important as questions of capability. Educational technology occupies a unique position because it influences not only what learners learn, but also how they learn and how their progress is evaluated. This creates a heightened responsibility to ensure that systems are fair, transparent, and aligned with educational objectives. Respecting intellectual property is also fundamental, as is ensuring that the use of AI supports a sustainable ecosystem for authors, educators, and content creators whose expertise underpins the quality of educational resources.

At OUP, responsible innovation is a core principle of our approach. We consider issues such as transparency, bias, privacy, inclusion, and accountability throughout the design and development process, rather than treating them as problems to solve later.

However, human oversight in the form of pedagogical and learning design, and assessment expertise remains essential. Educational outcomes cannot be delegated entirely to automated systems. Our own L2-Bench research highlighted areas where AI models still make problematic assumptions around learner appropriateness, cultural sensitivity and resource availability. These are areas where professional judgement remains critical.

In English language assessment at OUP, these considerations become even more important. AI can support areas such as item development, scoring and quality assurance, but assessment decisions have significant consequences for learners and must be underpinned by robust evidence. Innovation must be accompanied by rigorous

evaluation to ensure that scores accurately reflect learners' abilities and remain fair across different groups and contexts. Maintaining trust requires expert human oversight, thorough validation, and continuous monitoring to ensure AI-enhanced assessment remains reliable, transparent, and fit for purpose.

Shaping the future together

We believe that the future of educational and language learning AI will depend on collaboration across academia, industry, policy, and practice. No single organisation has all the answers, and no single perspective is sufficient.

That is why OUP partners with researchers, educators, and institutions, including our collaboration with the University of Oxford on L2-Bench and our involvement with AI in Education at Oxford University (AIEOU).

These collaborations help ensure that innovation remains grounded in evidence, educational expertise and real-world teaching practice.

The challenges associated with AI are complex and evolving. Meeting them successfully will require shared standards, open dialogue, and a willingness to learn from one another.

Looking Ahead

At the beginning of the AI conversation, the focus was on what the technology could do. Today, the more important question is what it should do for education.

At Oxford University Press, we believe AI should serve education, not the other way around. Its greatest opportunity in language learning lies in helping teachers teach more effectively, helping learners learn more successfully,

and extending access to high-quality learning experiences. By enhancing rather than replacing the role of teachers, strengthening rather than bypassing pedagogy, and focusing relentlessly on learner outcomes, AI has the potential to become a powerful force for better education.

The opportunities are significant but so too are the responsibilities in developing products that leverage AI. If we can combine technological innovation with educational expertise, rigorous evaluation, and responsible governance, we have an opportunity not simply to adopt AI in education, but to shape it in ways that genuinely improve learning.

That is the future that we are working towards. And it is one that places learners, teachers, and educational impact firmly at the centre.

Find out more

L2-Bench is an ongoing effort from Oxford University Press and colleagues at the University of Oxford to define meaningful standards for educational AI. If you're interested in contributing to this work, visit our website to learn more and join the growing community of educators and researchers helping shape the future of language learning. <https://benchmarks.elc.edu.oup.com/>



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Review of Promoting Professional Learning

by Silvana Richardson

CUPA, 2025

ISBN: 978-1-108-94901-9

This title is the fourth in a growing series aimed at educational managers.

Editor Andy Hockley wryly comments on how certain administrators, whilst keen to do so, are too often not quite sure how to correctly implement professional development. Yes, like myself, I'm sure you've also worked with (and maybe even suffered under) such loose cannons. Thankfully this title will go a long way towards addressing their incompetence or at least enlightening them. Put together by a trainer with heaps of experience in that role, for the most part the author spells things out in clear and simple terms that even the least knowledgeable DOS should be able to follow.

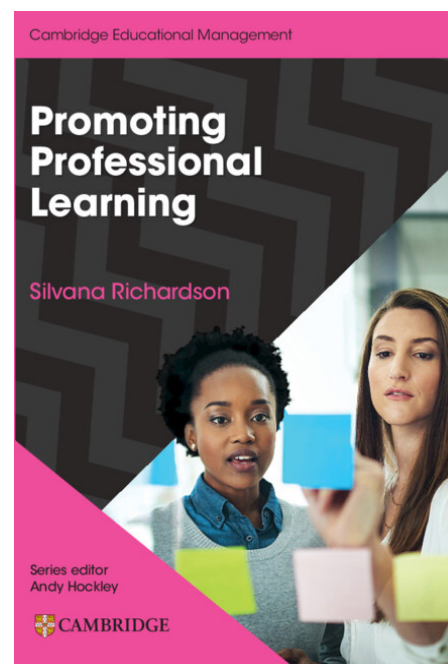
The opening chapter covers the recent history of professional development in language teaching and is concerned with putting across what impactful, long-lasting and transferable skills training involves. Moving on from in-service teacher-training and then action research (remember those days in the eighties and nineties?), the author next introduces evidence-informed teacher education. She is clearly a devotee of this notion and goes to great lengths to explain it, borrowing a smashing acronym, "INSPIRE", to ensure we remember teacher education should be impactful, needs-based, supported, practical, insightful, reflective and evaluated.

Chapter Two concerns creating the author's six listed essential conditions for teacher learning to take place, the principal ones in my own experience being committed leadership and developing an enabling culture. The following

chapter on planning organisation-driven teacher learning looks at how training may be either organised by the institution, by teachers themselves, or a combination of both. It explores the types and levels of impact plus the amount of expertise professional development activities based on a suitable needs analysis might achieve.

Planning and implementing teacher-driven teacher learning is perhaps the area classroom practitioners are most comfortably familiar with since it involves pursuing personal interests rather than having them imposed by an overly keen DOS. In particular, I would recommend administrators, both new to and experienced in professional development, spend a good deal of time digesting the contents of chapter four. Reflecting her balanced approach here, the author provides an objective summary of how teacher-driven initiatives may often lack relevance. And I found myself nodding in agreement with her point on how, if not monitored, many research projects may lead to merely superficial discoveries. I also found it curious, however, that while the excellent work of Richard Smith and Ann Burns on collaborative action research was suitably highlighted, no mention of Dick Allwright or Judith Hanks was made concerning their groundbreaking studies on exploratory practice. Is this an oversight, or simply a lack of space?

Evaluation of the impact of any aspect of professional learning is of course crucial, although too often this tends to take place mainly at the end. In Chapter Five, the author adopts Guskey's model of five levels of evaluation to gain a variety of valuable types of feedback at different stages. These are worth providing in full here: participants' reactions; participants' learning; organisational support



and change; participants' use of the new knowledge; students' learning outcomes. The final stage is of course the most important. Appendix 6 (page 171) provides the outline for implementing Guskey's model of data collection for feedback purposes, and I would recommend this be adopted by all administrators keen on professional development.

The final chapter is titled 'Bringing it all together', and it does that admirably well, managing to weave in the key points made in earlier chapters. This title is a superb addition to the Cambridge series on educational management, and I strongly recommend administrators in all forms and at all levels of ELT take a very good look at it.



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Experiences: Moldova

*Thinking of a career in ELT in Moldova? It comes highly recommended, says **Wayne Trotman**.*



“**M**oldova? Where’s that?” was my reaction when the regional ELT director told me he was sending me to Chişinău (“ki-shi-now”), its charming capital. Although I’d got a decent grade at GCE A-level Geography (back in the days when it was possible to fail such exams), I was still more of an expert on sheep farming in New Zealand than the location of increasingly vibrant former Soviet Union republics.

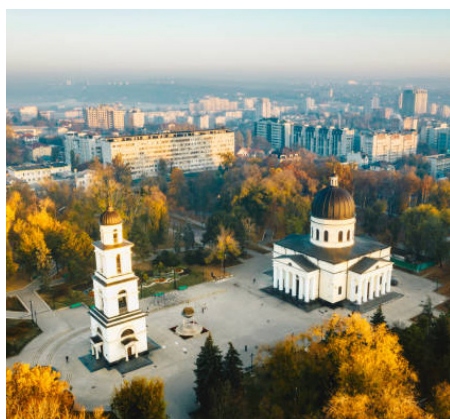
To save you hunting for an atlas, Moldova is the generally unnoticed Eastern European nation nestled between Romania and Ukraine which finally gained its independence in 1991. The total population, including the

unrecognised breakaway region of Transnistria to the east, is between 3.0 and 3.3 million; due to mass labour migration, it’s not easy to pin down. Approximately 20% of the nation resides in or near the capital, which is where most ELT related posts are likely to be advertised. Eastern Orthodox Christianity is the predominant religion, practiced by over 90% of Moldovans, which means Christmas and New Year celebrations take place fourteen days later than in western Europe.

In spite of having the most delightful cathedral and parks right in the centre of the Chişinău, Moldova too often tends to get a bad press. Go to YouTube and you’ll hear in almost every clip that ‘after

Ukraine, Moldova is the poorest and least visited country in Europe.’ I’ve visited several times now, and although many pavements are indeed rather challenging, do not let these naysayers put you off. Moldova would be a great place to start your career in ELT. And who knows? You might like to stay forever!

In Chişinău and Bălţi (“baltsy”) the second most populated city further north, there is growing demand for qualified English teachers. South of Chişinău lies the small town of Comrat, where ELT posts are sometimes advertised. Apparently rural areas also seek English educators, though opportunities may be less formal and often involve community or volunteer programmes.



Moldova is not (yet) a member of the European Union, so regardless of your citizenship you'll need a work permit. Due to the red tape involved in getting one it's advisable to have a job offer in place prior to arrival. If you've yet to qualify as a language teacher and you'd like to train there, Alliance Francaise de Moldavie in Chişinău is the only institution offering the CELTA in Moldova. As they also administer Cambridge English exams, you might like to enquire about becoming part of their team. If you plan to work long-term in a private high school, the Heritage International School in Chişinău would be the ideal place to begin your job search.

In recent years Moldova has been increasing its focus on English language education and due to aspirations of closer integration with the European Union, English proficiency is becoming more valued in schools, universities, and professional sectors. In well-known stores, cafes, bars, restaurants and hotels, you'll notice English is often spoken to an advanced level in Chişinău, but largely by the younger generation. Most Moldovans are bi-lingual, speaking the national language, which is Romanian, but as you'll also hear a lot of Russian it might be helpful to sign up for tuition in one or both of these if you plan a long-term stay.

The currency in Moldova is the *leu* (plural: *lei*). Walking around central Chişinău, you'll notice there are exchange offices on almost every corner. This is because the economy has historically relied heavily on money sent home from citizens working abroad. Currently, you'll get approximately twenty lei for one euro, which is enough to buy a small beer or a decent Americano coffee.

The salary of a language teacher varies between locations and employers. Since the average national monthly salary is around 400 GBP, however, teachers should be looking for much more than this unless free accommodation is provided.

Most visitors from overseas will notice that for them, the cost of living is pretty low, and they can live well on a relatively modest budget. However, since locals' wages are often low, they won't take too kindly to your comments of "It's really cheap here"; for them it's probably not! In recent years inflation has, I am reliably informed, been kept well below 10%.

The most attractive social life is to be found in Chişinău, where many bars and dining spots are open till late. Restaurants such as *Divus* next to Thomas Albert Hotel and the aptly named bar, *Wine Republic* just around the corner, are highly recommended.

If you're thinking of travelling, Bucharest is only five hours south-west by train, but if you're looking for something much more brutal, go east till you cross into the disputed region of Transnistria and its capital Tiraspol where you'll think you've entered the former Soviet Union. Visitors need to register, but there is no passport stamping involved. If you choose to

reside in the capital, the Alexander Pushkin home and museum, the soviet style railway station and the bustling central market are all well worth investigating.

Busy language teachers need to eat wholesome food of course, and Moldova will not disappoint. The national dish is *mamaliga*, a thick, golden cornmeal porridge highly like Italian polenta, but traditionally cooked to be dense enough to be sliced with a string. Personally, I would recommend other more enticing fare, such as *zeama*, a creamy chicken soup, or *plaçinte* – sweet or savoury pie. Both Andy's and La Plaçinte are the best places for a wide range of local cuisine.

And if like myself, after a long afternoon explaining arcane grammar points you are partial to the occasional glass of wine, then you've probably hit the jackpot. Moldova produces some of the best wines in the world and this is its largest export. And get this: Moldova even boasts a National Wine Day (the first weekend in October), when the city shuts down for wine tastings, live music and street food. I can almost hear you leaving to purchase your plane tickets.



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