THE LEARNING ELT PROFESSIONAL
THE LEARNING ELT PROFESSIONAL

3RD ELT MALTA CONFERENCE SELECTIONS

Edited by Daniel Xerri and Odette Vassallo
The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts.

– C. S. Lewis

This book is dedicated to all inspiring ELT professionals.
Contents

Foreword .......................................................................................................................... IX

Preface ........................................................................................................................... XI

1. The learning ELT professional: an introduction
   Daniel Xerri and Odette Vassallo ............................................................................. 1

2. Professional learning through teacher research
   Simon Borg .................................................................................................................. 11

3. Action research: getting started
   Larissa Attard .......................................................................................................... 19

4. Language teachers’ perceptions of doing teacher research:
   a Maltese case study
   Kenan Dikilitaş and Koray Akyazı ........................................................................... 29

5. An ELT teacher’s reflective journey: a bottom-up approach
   to continuing professional development
   Caroline Campbell .................................................................................................... 41

6. A research-based approach to teaching prewriting strategies
   in academic writing
   Mario Aquilina ......................................................................................................... 51

7. Feedback practices and strategies: perceptions and challenges
   Stephanie Xerri Agius .............................................................................................. 61

8. Rescuing babies: modern uses for old techniques
   Alan Marsh ................................................................................................................. 71

9. A digital literacies primer
   Gavin Dudeney ......................................................................................................... 89

About the contributors .................................................................................................... 99
FOREWORD

Hon. Evarist Bartolo
Minister for Education and Employment, Malta

The Indian poet and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore (1996) believed that just like a lamp can never light another lamp unless it continues to burn its own flame, teachers can never truly teach unless they are still learning themselves (p. 64). As a child he abhorred formal education and the subject he disliked the most was English. Later he wrote that “The main object of teaching is not to explain meanings, but to knock at the doors of the mind” (Tagore, 1916/2007, p. 73). In order for teachers to motivate learners to discover a galaxy of knowledge and develop the skills they require to steer their course through life, it is essential that they themselves should be intrigued by the learning process throughout their entire professional lives. In order for teachers to nurture learners’ curiosity, they must identify completely with the role of a learner.

As the world’s global language, English acts as a vehicle of opportunity for an increasing number of people from a wide range of contexts and social backgrounds. English is also an avenue for personal and cultural enrichment. ELT is rendered noble by the fact that it facilitates access to such opportunity and enrichment. ELT professionals are endowed with the privilege of teaching a language that has become synonymous with empowerment and the fulfilling of a learner’s dreams and personal potential. Enabling as many people as possible to learn English is paramount; the language should not just be the preserve of those who can afford to learn it. However, it would be mistaken to assume that English could be taught by anyone who possesses a high level of proficiency in the language. The fact that ELT is a highly lucrative industry worldwide has meant that this misconception has taken root in some contexts. However, ELT is a profession because those who practise it value the pedagogical and linguistic knowledge and skills that need to be developed at pre-service level and cultivated in the course of one’s career.

Internationally, ELT is considered to be at the forefront of innovative language teaching methods and approaches. Over the past few decades it has helped to establish forms of language pedagogy that are communicative and learner-centred in nature. These have now become de rigueur not just in ELT but in the teaching of other languages too. One of the possible reasons for such trailblazing is that ELT has almost always underscored the significance of teacher education and development. This has not only ensured that adequate support is provided to those individuals who embark on the ELT profession, but it has also fostered the right conditions for ELT professionals around the world to experiment with classroom practices and investigate their constitution as professionals.

This aptly entitled book foregrounds teachers’ identity as professional learners. It highlights ways in which ELT professionals may continue to develop their knowledge, skills and beliefs in order for teaching to be more effective in its endeavour to knock at the doors of learners’ minds.
REFERENCES

PREFACE

Jeremy Harmer
Freelance, United Kingdom

It is quite possible that people who are not familiar with Malta have no idea of the strength and resilience of its ELT sector. That is a pity because, as in so many other areas of life, the islands (to use a rather blunt cliché) punch above their weight. And it is not just the numbers – though they are impressive; it is also the care that goes into the nurturing of the industry and the inspection system which the ELT Council oversees and which does its level best to make sure that the students who pour into Malta every year are given the best care, both pedagogic and pastoral.

Something else that the council does is to organize an annual conference with the express aim of involving the teachers in the latest thinking, research and feelings about how languages should be learned and taught. You would think we would know about all that by now, but – and this is one of the reasons that what we do is so continually invigorating – the pieces never seem to quite fit. There is always something more to think about, something new and challenging to engage our interest, some new ‘metaphor’ – in Lightbown and Spada’s (2013) words – to alter our thinking. Humans, especially humans-in-groups, which is how most people prefer to learn languages, just will not conform to strict and easily-interpretable measuring. Nowhere is this more true than in learning, where the variables of personality, motivation, environment, interpersonal classroom interaction and pedagogical intervention all play their part.

One of the ways that teachers can try and fit the pieces together in this vast pedagogical jigsaw is to read research. Often contradictory and sometimes counter-intuitive, what researchers tell us has to inform what we do; it is foolish to discount the findings of studies both small- and large-scale as some teachers are occasionally inclined to do. And anyway, there is an alternative, a complimentary path that we can follow, a path which will keep us going and which can inform every aspect of our practice. This is Action Research – which is a natural process for a reflective teacher.

For many people teaching is best thought of as a felicitous marriage between instinct and experience. Yet our instincts can, of course, be wrong, and our experience is only valuable if we learn from it. That is why we need to become experts in what I like to call ‘two-brain teaching’. One ‘brain’ is taken up with the minute-by-minute interactions in the classroom, some of which we respond to instinctually, but the second brain is there, hovering somewhere in the classroom air, to constantly monitor and evaluate what is going on, watching what brain number 1 is doing and trying to make sense of it all. And then, if we give it space, that second brain comes into its own when the lesson is over. That is when we think back to what went on and try to tease out why things happened this way and what we might want to do differently on a future occasion. It can and should be a highly intense and stimulating experience and at its best, that is what reflective teachers do all the time – use their second brains to
evaluate their experiences. As an aside, I have always worried slightly that the word ‘reflective’ seems to have a more relaxed connotation than the process I am describing, but for effective reflective teachers that act of self-evaluation and memory processing is not a restful act; it is an exciting and stimulating one.

How do we stimulate both brains? By doing our own research – which means trying out new things (or re-visiting old ones) – about what works and then letting both brains have a dialogue about how effective these practices have been. That process is what many of the articles in this collection are about and they perfectly complement the work of the ELT Council, one of whose chief aims is to sustain an ongoing conversation about how teaching and learning works and how it can be improved. Or, just as importantly, how teachers keep on learning, questioning and researching – for that kind of thinking is the lifeblood of the inquisitive and enquiring teacher.

Old techniques, new techniques? A digital revolution? The world never stands still; the world of English Language Teaching is constantly turning. That is why the articles in this collection are so timely and so important.
REFERENCES

The learning ELT professional: an introduction

Daniel Xerri and Odette Vassallo
ELT Council, Malta

This book consists of a selection of papers based on talks and workshops delivered at the 3rd ELT Malta conference. The book’s title is derived from the theme of the conference and it brings together the perspectives of a group of international and Maltese experts in ELT, all of whom address the idea that learning needs to be an intrinsic part of the identity of ELT professionals.
ELT IN MALTA

Every year, Malta caters for the needs of around 77,000 students coming from more than 40 countries (NSO, 2015). The ELT sector is a key contributor to Malta’s economy given that students account for around 4% of the total number of tourist arrivals (NSO, 2015). More significantly, a typical student spends three weeks in Malta, with the total number of weeks for international students amounting to more than 245,000 (NSO, 2015). Since the founding of the first language school in the 1960s, it is estimated that Malta has taught English to more than one million students from around the world. These students chose Malta as their language-learning destination not only because of its culture, climate and beaches, but also because over the past 50 years, the country’s ELT industry has built an international reputation for academic excellence. There are currently more than 45 licenced schools in operation and they range from family businesses to multinational companies with schools in different continents. This diversity is highly important since students who opt for Malta as their academic destination are spoilt for choice when it comes to selecting a school that best fits their requirements. Such diversity is also of crucial importance to Malta’s success in carving a niche in the global ELT sector.

Over the past few years, a number of ELT schools have taken the initiative to look beyond the industry’s five biggest clients – all located in Europe – and explore new markets in order to attract students from far-flung parts of the world. In most classrooms there is increasingly a bigger mix of nationalities that make the language learning experience even more satisfying. However, schools need to be provided with more support in order for the ELT industry in Malta to continue prospering. If this industry is to contribute even further to Malta’s economy, then there should be provisions in place that facilitate the process of attracting students from an even wider variety of countries.

Ever since its inception, the ELT industry in Malta has always been renowned for its high academic standards. Despite its small size, the country has an ELT industry that can provide larger competitors with a run for their money. It can do so because Malta was the first country to regulate this industry by enacting legislation; this was meant at safeguarding the interests of all relevant stakeholders. The EFL Monitoring Board, the forerunner of the ELT Council, was set up in 1996; over the years, it published policies that regulated all aspects of a student’s stay in Malta. Fully aware of the dangers that are associated with an exclusively top-down approach to educational management, the EFL Monitoring Board implemented policies that were entrenched in grassroots-level consultation and the sharing of best practice. In doing so, it consulted both FELTOM and MATEFL, the school owners’ association and the teachers’ association respectively. The EFL Monitoring Board was responsible for designing the Test for English Language Teachers (TELT), an internationally level-rated examination that assesses the language awareness requirements of teachers, as well as TEFL Cert., a pre-service teacher education programme that specifies all the pedagogical knowledge and skills that ELT professionals require in order to function effectively. Before ceasing operations, the
EFL Monitoring Board produced legislation aimed at ensuring that regulations are in line with the needs of the industry in the 21st century and guaranteeing even higher levels of quality. This legislation led to the creation of the ELT Council, which took on the mission and remit of the EFL Monitoring Board as well as added powers and responsibilities.

In the last four years of its operation, the EFL Monitoring Board broadened the scope of its interests and sought to forge ties with various entities in an effort to maintain high standards of English proficiency in Malta. For example, in 2014 it collaborated with Aġenzija Żgħażagħ in order to engage ELT schools in a corporate social responsibility programme aimed at developing English proficiency levels of vulnerable Maltese youths. This kind of collaboration amongst different stakeholders continues to be an objective of the ELT Council given its conviction that Malta’s bilingual identity provides it with a competitive edge. Preserving the status of English in Malta is of utmost importance if the country is to continue reaping the benefits it has enjoyed so far.

One means of maintaining high standards of English is by enhancing teaching standards. It is for this reason that the ELT Council is committed to fostering a culture of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) amongst teachers. In order to guarantee even better teaching, the ELT Council encourages language schools to promote CPD as an intrinsic part of their academic philosophy. It does this partly by means of its academic school visits policy, which seeks to help schools with the use of teacher portfolios. Moreover, it collaborates with the Education Officers for English within the Department of Quality and Standards in Education in order to provide mainstream teachers at primary and secondary levels with in-service training aimed at enhancing their language awareness and methodology. Together with FELTOM, the ELT Council supports the University of Malta’s MA in TESOL. Launched in 2014, this programme has the potential to lead to a better-informed cadre of professionals who are able to occupy the top academic positions in Malta’s ELT industry. Through such initiatives, the ELT Council aims to keep fostering the growth of teachers of English and other ELT professionals.

ELT PROFESSION IN MALTA

The term *industry* is commonly used to refer to ELT in Malta and that is because the teaching of English is a profit-making sector in this country. However, one must never lose sight of the fact that this is an industry that is almost entirely dependent on a single profession: teaching. The quality of teaching is what has built the industry’s international reputation. The facilities of the schools, the leisure activities organised for students, the non-academic services provided to them are very important. They are a significant part of the package offered to those visiting Malta for the purpose of learning English. Nonetheless, it is because of teachers’ knowledge and skills that the ELT industry has thrived so much. Its success is due to the top quality teaching that is delivered on a daily basis.
The composition of the ELT profession in Malta is adequately varied, consisting of both native and second language speakers of English with a wide range of ages and life experiences. Around 1,400 teachers work in the ELT sector and the majority of them are employed on a part-time basis while usually acting as teachers in mainstream schools (NSO, 2015). More than 70% of these teachers are female and a significant proportion of women occupy decision-making posts in most ELT schools. Half of all the Directors of Studies in Malta are women and the success of this industry owes a lot to women’s insightful contributions. All the teachers working in the ELT sector in Malta are employed on the basis of specific minimum requirements in terms of qualifications in pedagogy and language proficiency and awareness. The industry encourages people from all walks of life to obtain the necessary qualifications in order to teach English. The university student population has always been one of the mainstays of the ELT profession in Malta and many undergraduates start teaching English while reading for a degree. This initial teaching experience provides them with the opportunity of meeting people from all over the world and allows them to value the contribution that English teachers make to the attainment of students’ aspirations. This profession also welcomes people who might have been doing a variety of other jobs before choosing to become teachers. This blend of life experiences helps to create a highly dynamic group of teachers that enrich their students’ learning. Those who choose to make teaching their vocation also choose to embrace the fact that teaching necessarily involves constant learning. As teachers they are convinced that learning is an experience that lasts a lifetime and it is only because they are passionate about learning that they can fulfil their duties as teachers. It is for this that the ELT Malta conference was launched in 2012 and it has kept this annual appointment with ELT professionals ever since.

**ELT MALTA CONFERENCE**

Given its appreciation of the fact that MATEFL, FELTOM, and individual teacher trainers regularly run workshops and seminars for CPD purposes, the EFL Monitoring Board in 2012 took the initiative to organise the country’s first ELT conference so that as many teachers as possible would be provided with a means of professional growth. The organisers of this seminal event in the history of ELT in Malta hoped that it would be the first in a series of annual conferences in which teachers of English working in different contexts could come together to celebrate their profession. The hope was that the conference would complement the many other CPD opportunities available to teachers of English in Malta, especially in an era characterised by the prevalence of online forms of professional development. In organising the 1st ELT Malta conference, the EFL Monitoring Board sought the collaboration of the English Language Resource Centre, and the support of FELTOM and MATEFL. It did this because it wanted the conference to address the
needs of all English language teachers and not only of those teachers involved in the ELT sector. The conference organisers believed in the value of cross-pollination and were aware that many mainstream teachers worked in the ELT sector in the peak season, i.e. July and August.

Since its first edition, the ELT Malta conference has acted as a learning experience for all participants. ELT professionals gather to listen to speakers who have amassed a substantial amount of knowledge about the profession and who have ideas that they would like to share with their audience. The latter, in turn, attend the conference because they want to contribute their thoughts and experiences and because they feel enthusiastic about the fact that learning is a highly social activity that is dependent on the exchange of ideas. The participants question these same ideas and adapt them to their respective classrooms, fully knowing that as ELT professionals they need to avoid a one-size-fits-all mentality.

As one of the plenary speakers at the 3rd ELT Malta conference points out in his book *Learning Teaching*, “In order to become a better teacher, it seems important to be aware of as many options as possible. This may enable you to generate your own rules and guidelines as to what works and what doesn’t” (Scrivener, 2011, p. 8). One of the aims of the ELT Malta conference has always been that of providing teachers with access to new options so that they may continue enriching their teaching.

It is in recognition of the fact that the quality of teachers needs to remain the industry’s first priority that the ELT Malta conference is organised every year. Just like its collaborators within MATEFL, FELTOM and the schools themselves, the conference organisers see teaching as a lifelong learning process. The very first edition of the conference owed its origins to the idea that the industry required a unified event that celebrated ELT professionals’ identity as learners. Their knowledge, skills and attitudes need to be constantly nurtured and developed; otherwise, stagnation is inevitable and the repercussions of that are disgruntled students for whom no learning is taking place. Teachers who are not motivated to keep learning cannot inspire their students to do the same. Without their admirable commitment to learning, the ELT Malta conference would not have continued to take place year after year.

Attending the ELT Malta conference is not only a means for teachers to be inspired by different speakers in order for them to inspire their students. The conference is also meant to encourage ELT professionals to position themselves differently. They can be inspiring for their own peers if they start valuing their potential to be more than consumers of knowledge. Their experiences as ELT professionals, in schools and in CPD events like the ELT Malta conference, allow them to be contributors to the professional development of others. Harmer (2012), a plenary speaker at the 2nd ELT Malta conference, points out that “Some of the most effective teacher development takes place when we work and share with colleagues and other professionals” (p. 173). Most probably, the emphasis in that sentence should fall on the word *share*. There are so many ways in which teachers
can engage in such sharing. They could give a joint session at a conference like ELT Malta or at one of the regular CPD events organised by a teachers’ association like MATEFL. They could write a blog and comment on those written by so many ELT bloggers from all over the world, or use Twitter and Facebook to discuss issues they find relevant to their practice. They could rope in a colleague and engage in action research, or collaborate in writing an article for a teachers’ magazine. They could do peer observation with colleagues they trust, or take part in webinars. Most importantly, they could talk to their colleagues about their ideas and use these discussions to reflect on what happens in the classroom.

Ever since it was first organised, the ELT Malta conference has sought to bring about a mind shift amongst ELT professionals in the industry. The hope has always been that as many professionals as possible would muster the courage to share what they know with their peers. Such professionals already inspire their students and that is why ELT in Malta is a healthy sector. However, the conference is meant to encourage them to position themselves as inspiring teachers of teachers, in their schools, in the blogosphere, and at CPD events in Malta and beyond its shores. It was for this reason that at the 3rd ELT Malta conference the Inspiring ELT Professional Award was given for the first time. This was awarded to Alan Marsh, one of the contributors to this book. With such a long-standing ELT industry, professionals in Malta have so much to offer one another and those working in other countries. They have a wealth of ELT knowledge and experience to export far and wide. The fact that professionals working in Malta have authored a number of contributions in this book is probably an indication that the ELT Malta conference has helped to ignite the spark of inspiration. Hopefully, this book will act as a means by which the act of sharing can take a leap forward.

THE LEARNING ELT PROFESSIONAL

The 3rd ELT Malta conference spanned over four days, starting with an IATEFL Research SIG supported event led by Simon Borg and consisting of 19 workshops and 6 plenary sessions, some of which were delivered by the likes of Carol Read, Lindsay Clandfield, and Jamie Keddie. The fact that a sizeable number of participants registered for Borg’s workshop on doing good quality ELT research was testament to the fact that there is a growing commitment to non-traditional forms of professional development in Malta’s ELT industry. This is reassuring given that the industry urgently requires more teachers to adopt the role of research-engaged professionals.

The conference theme focused on the learning ELT professional because of the belief that effective professionals are primarily effective learners. They value the development of their own knowledge, skills and beliefs. They refuse to stagnate as professionals. They embrace learning, its joys and its challenges. ELT professionals can lead by example by demonstrating the attitudes of effective learners. They can act as role models by being fully engaged with the lifelong learning process.
The eight papers in this book address the issue of ELT professionals’ learning development by either showcasing how they can position themselves as learners or by discussing pedagogical approaches that can enrich classroom practices.

The papers by Simon Borg, Larissa Attard, and Kenan Dikilitaş and Koray Akyazı focus on how teacher research can act as a form of professional learning. Borg argues that teacher research is a highly valid form of professional development as it enables practitioners to become knowledge producers, this being in contrast to the traditional view of teachers as consumers of the knowledge shared by experts coming from outside the school. Hence, teacher research is empowering given that it provides practitioners with ownership over their professional development. Recognising the validity of this idea, Attard provides an introduction to how practitioners may engage in one type of teacher research. Action research is a systematic approach to teacher research in that it allows practitioners to investigate their own practices and classrooms by following a number of stages and cycles. Attard’s paper gives a lot of importance to the preparation stage and seeks to provide a model for this given that some teachers might consider this stage to be the most challenging one. Given the possibility that teacher research might be perceived as demanding, in their paper Dikilitaş and Akyazı explore the perceptions of a group of ELT professionals in Malta. Their study shows that despite some negative views, doing teacher research is mostly deemed to be a professional development activity that enhances beliefs and practices, and possesses relevance to the classroom.

Writing is the focus of the papers by Caroline Campbell, Mario Aquilina and Stephanie Xerri Agius, each author approaching the subject from somewhat different angles. Campbell discusses the significance of writing as a tool that facilitates teachers’ reflective practice. She delineates a process that facilitates teachers’ reflective journey and provides them with ownership of their professional development. Besides being necessary for this purpose, writing is also one of the skills that ELT professionals give a lot of attention to in schools. Hence, developing their knowledge of how to address students’ needs more effectively is crucial. Aquilina’s paper builds on research in order to equip the reader with a better understanding of how to exploit pre-writing strategies in academic writing classes. The instructional practices he explicates are derived from both genre-based and process approaches to the teaching of writing. Within the latter field over the past few years the issue of feedback has become one of the main areas of concern. Xerri Agius discusses the principles of feedback practice and presents a number of strategies for providing and implementing feedback. Based on research investigating learners’ perceptions of feedback, her paper indicates how some of the most common challenges involved in providing feedback can be overcome.

In order to better address the needs of learners in the 21st century, ELT professionals are required to demonstrate the ability to repackage their existent knowledge as well as develop new competences. This is what the papers by Alan Marsh and Gavin Dudeney touch upon respectively. Marsh proposes a number of
ways by means of which the teaching techniques associated with methodological principles that might no longer be considered valid can be reactivated once they are merged with contemporary ELT approaches. He illustrates how translation, stimulus-response pattern drills, teacher talk time, and the PPP model could all benefit from such treatment. Dudeney’s paper acts as a digital literacies primer for ELT professionals working in a learning environment in which the use of technology prevails. It starts by defining digital literacy and then develops a taxonomy of sub-literacies by analyzing the concept of digital literacies.

All eight papers seem to indicate that a positive attitude towards professional learning is necessary on the part of ELT professionals. The authors exemplify how such learning may be conducted by either focusing on empowering forms of CPD like teacher research or else by reexamining how professional and pedagogical knowledge and skills may be harnessed and enhanced. In this sense, this book propounds the idea that learning is a fundamental part of every ELT professional’s identity.

daniel.xerri@um.edu.mt
odette.vassallo@um.edu.mt
REFERENCES

Professional learning through teacher research

Simon Borg
Freelance ELT Consultant, Slovenia

Conventional approaches to professional development view teachers as knowledge consumers who are dependent on external expertise for their growth. In contrast, professional development can be seen as a process through which teachers generate knowledge themselves. This paper discusses these two perspectives, highlights the limitations of exclusive reliance on the former, and examines in particular teacher research as a ‘knowledge generating’ strategy that allows teachers to take charge of their own professional development.
INTRODUCTION

The centrality of the teacher to the quality of education has been increasingly affirmed in recent years; for example, Schwille et al. (2007) note that “the teacher is at the epicentre of the learning process...learning depends first and foremost on the quality of the teacher” (p. 15). The question, then, is no longer whether Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is necessary – it is clearly an essential factor in sustaining teacher quality – but what forms of professional development are more likely to promote sustainable positive changes in teaching and learning. This paper examines current views of professional development in ELT and suggests that alternatives which give teachers a more central role in their own learning are needed.

TWO VIEWS OF CPD

CPD can be characterised in two contrasting ways. The first places teachers in the role of consumers. The second sees them as knowledge generators. ELT is characterised by a strong tradition of professional development, yet I would suggest that, globally, the kinds of CPD that teachers of English experience fall into the former category. I will first comment on some problems with this ‘teacher as knowledge consumer’ view of CPD, then discuss some features of the ‘teacher as knowledge generator’ perspective and focus on one example of how it might be implemented.

Teachers as knowledge consumers

CPD which casts teachers in the role of knowledge consumers tends to focus on the provision of input by external experts. This approach to CPD often has a training orientation which emphasizes the need for teachers to be taught desirable teaching behaviours. There is an assumption that teachers need to do something they are currently unable to do and the purpose of the training is to teach them to do it. It is also assumed that after the training teachers will then apply the behaviours learned to their classrooms (the classroom is thus not seen as a site for professional learning but simply a place where the application of knowledge occurs). Training of this kind also occurs off-site – typically at a training centre – rather than being classroom or workplace-based. There is a paradox here as while teachers spend the bulk of their time in the classroom, professional development typically involves activities that occur away from this site – for example, workshops, lectures, courses and conferences. There is of course value in all such activities; however, exclusive reliance on external opportunities for professional development has several drawbacks, summarized in Table 1.
### TABLE 1: ‘EXTERNAL’ TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infrequent</td>
<td>Teachers cannot attend external events on a regular basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costly</td>
<td>Teachers or their schools must pay to attend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive</td>
<td>Teachers are taken out of school and lessons must be rearranged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generic</td>
<td>External training may not address individual teacher needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decontextualized</td>
<td>Learning is not situated in teachers' classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receptive</td>
<td>Teachers receive knowledge from more 'expert' trainers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not ‘owned’</td>
<td>Teachers have minimal say in decisions about the training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final point in Table 1 is an important one; teachers who are not involved in decisions about their professional development may be less motivated to engage in the activities that others prescribe. This point is made by Muijs et al. (2014) in their discussion of the factors that limit the effectiveness of professional development initiatives:

The problem...is that the need to know something new is identified by someone external to the group of teachers (e.g., a policy official or a researcher) without the participating teachers necessarily understanding the reason why it is important to know it or being committed to doing so. (p. 247)

**Teachers as knowledge creators**

A contrasting view of CPD sees teachers as knowledge generators. From this perspective, the emphasis is on professional learning – on creating thoughtful but critical understandings of practice – rather than on the generic and uncritical application of activities and techniques. CPD of this kind is typically school-placed and the classroom is valued as a site for professional learning, not just a place to apply received knowledge. The key learning process here is inquiry – this is seen as a powerful strategy through which teachers grow, individually and collaboratively. One other characteristic we can mention here is that CPD of this kind tends to be teacher-owned; teachers contribute in a significant way to decisions about the content and process of their own professional learning.

This contemporary perspective on CPD can take many different forms, such as peer observation (Richards & Farrell, 2005), lesson study (Tasker, 2011), reading groups (Fenton-Smith & Stillwell, 2011) and action research (Burns, 2010). Teacher research (Borg, 2013) is another option and I will now examine this strategy for CPD in more detail.
TEACHER RESEARCH

Teachers often react negatively to the suggestion that they can use teacher research to support their professional development. These reactions stem from misconceptions about what research is and Figure 1 shows six common ideas about research that teachers often have.

![FIGURE 1: MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE DEFINING FEATURES OF RESEARCH](image)

Research very often does have one or more of these characteristics; however, none of them are defining features of research. For example, although teachers often see research as an activity that is academic (i.e. done to obtain a degree or by someone working in academia), research can also be done by teachers to support their professional development. And, to take two further examples, while research may be large-scale and statistical, it can also be small-scale and qualitative. In introducing teacher research, then, it is important to ensure that research is not being conceived of by teachers in ways which make it appear to be an unfeasible and irrelevant activity. Research should not be defined with reference to its scale, its methodology or the status of the researcher; rather, I find it useful to see it more generally as planned, systematic, purposeful, empirical inquiry which is made public. This definition of research is an appropriate way into a more specific definition of teacher research, which can be distinguished from other forms of research in three particular ways:
1. It is done by teachers – i.e. teachers are the researchers.
2. It takes place in teachers’ working contexts – the site for teacher research is the school or classroom.
3. Its purpose is to enhance teachers’ work – teacher research allows teachers to understand themselves, their teaching and their students; such understandings can also contribute to the growth of the organization teachers work in.

It is important to stress that teacher research is not simply research done by teachers; a teacher doing research for their MA degree who studies other teachers (e.g. through a questionnaire) is not doing teacher research because the focus is not on themselves; similarly, not all research done in the classroom is teacher research – e.g. an academic who visits a school to collect classroom data is not investigating their own teaching but studying others in the way that research conventionally does – this is not teacher research.

**Doing teacher research**

The starting point for teacher research is a question of some kind – an issue that the teacher wants to learn more about or understand better. Although this initial question is often driven by a problem, teacher research is not simply a strategy for solving problems. For example, teachers may want to develop a better understanding of something that works well. The questions that drive teacher research will also be very practical, stemming from teachers’ experiences in the classrooms. How can I integrate pair work activities into my lectures? What kind of feedback on writing do my students prefer? How do my learners react to the use of self-assessment? These are examples of questions teachers have investigated using teacher research (see Borg, 2014a for more examples of the kinds of questions teacher research can explore).

Once teachers have a question, the next step is to act – to collect some information (or data) relevant to it. This is a central part of the process – teacher research is empirical (i.e. it relies on the collection and analysis of data). The information that is collected needs to be analysed and evaluated, and teachers then use the insights emerging from these processes to make pedagogical decisions. The cyclical nature of teacher research means that the process can go through several iterations; this does not mean that teachers will be doing teacher research all the time, but more generally the idea is that it is not a linear process through which definitive solutions or answers will be discovered after one cycle of inquiry.

There are four additional processes which can enhance teacher research: *reflection*, because teacher researchers are by definition being systematically thoughtful about their work in an on-going manner; *reading*, because it can be useful to know about what others have already written about the issues teachers are interested in (there is no suggestion here, though, that teacher research
should involve the kind of reading that would be required for an academic degree); communicating, because by talking to colleagues about their inquiries teachers can receive useful feedback and advice and also motivate others to engage in inquiries of their own; and finally, collaborating, because teacher research (and professional development generally) will be enhanced when teachers work together on a shared project rather than alone.

As noted above, teachers need to collect data to help them examine the questions they are pursuing. Various strategies for data collection are available to teachers – e.g. journal writing, surveys, drawings and photos, video, observation, interviews, class discussions, and documents such as student work and lesson plans. One key consideration which should influence which options teachers employ is feasibility – teacher research must be feasible, as it is an activity which teachers do as part of their normal teaching duties; data collection, then, should be integrated as far as possible into teachers’ regular work (as opposed to creating large amounts of extra work for them).

**Benefits of teacher research**

Numerous benefits of teacher research have been identified in the literature (e.g. Borg, 2014b; Borg & Sanchez, 2015; Burns, 2014; Smith, Connelly, & Rebolledo, 2014). For example, teachers engaged in teacher research have said they feel more confident, motivated and autonomous; they also feel they are more knowledgeable and have a better understanding of their students. Where teacher research is collaborative, teachers have also reported improvements in their relationships with colleagues. Teacher research allows teachers to be more optimistic; as one teacher I worked with said, “I look upon problems as challenges to be overcome through research not hurdles to cry about.” Renewed enthusiasm is another benefit that teachers derive from teacher research, as illustrated in this comment: “We have been teaching the same way we taught ten years ago but now we have an urge to experiment with new ideas in our teaching.” It is clear then that teacher research offers many potential benefits to teachers; their students also benefit from more informed pedagogical decisions while organizations can benefit too where a culture of teacher research exists across a school. As evidence of these many benefits grows, teacher research is becoming increasingly visible as a professional development strategy for teachers. For example, Cambridge English and English Australia run a teacher research scheme for ELT professionals in Australia; Cambridge English and English UK run a similar scheme for teachers of English in the UK; while Cambridge University Press also recently launched its own teacher research scheme. The British Council is also supporting teacher research, as for example in the project I facilitated with teachers of English in Pakistan in 2012–2013 and which resulted in a publication containing the reports of teachers’ work (Borg, 2014b).
CONCLUSION

I started this paper by arguing that exclusive reliance on external forms of professional development has several drawbacks. In contrast, teacher research provides an option which allows professional development to be on-going, inexpensive, integrated into teachers’ routine work, personalized, and practical. Teacher research also gives teachers a strong sense of ownership in shaping the direction their professional development takes. I am not of course suggesting that teacher research is the right or only option for all teachers – teachers in different contexts and at different stages of their career will benefit in varying ways from different approaches to professional development; however, where the conditions are appropriate (see Borg, 2006) and teachers have suitable skills, knowledge and dispositions, teacher research has significant transformative potential.

s.borg@education.leeds.ac.uk
REFERENCES


Action research: getting started

Larissa Attard
Freelance, Malta

Action research is conducted by teachers in the classroom to scientifically measure questions or notions they may have about aspects of their teaching or their students’ learning. Although much like the reflective model, action research differs in that it is written down and shared with members of the teaching community. Like most first attempts, the starting point for teachers new to action research is perhaps the hardest. This paper briefly introduces the action research cycle and focuses on the preparation stage where teachers develop a research question and come up with a plan to collect the data; once the preparation stage has been completed, teachers may put their plan into action and work through the different stages of the action research cycle. The intention of this paper is to break the preparation stage into distinct parts and to provide a model for teachers who may be interested in conducting their own action research.
INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on a workshop that was presented at the 3rd ELT Malta Conference held in November 2014. The workshop started off with a brief introduction to action research and its cyclical development, after which the focus was on the preparation stage: where to start from and how to plan the process before putting the research plan into action. The participants present at the workshop were provided with a model to help them get started on action research in an area of interest they might later identify. This paper will briefly introduce action research and clarify where it differs from reflective research, focus on the preparation stage leading up to the development of a plan, and highlight a model to help teachers who have never done any action research before to put together a plan of action.

ACTION RESEARCH AND WHERE IT DIFFERS FROM THE REFLECTIVE MODEL

Action research is a form of teacher research carried out individually or collaboratively in teachers’ classrooms. According to Nunan (as cited in Burns, 2010), research is made up of three essentials: “(1) a question, problem or hypothesis, (2) data, (3) analysis and interpretation” (p. 11). The process is triggered by an observation or a question teachers may have about a particular aspect of their teaching or their students’ learning, or even a different technique they may have come across in an article published in a teaching journal or a teacher training session they may have attended. Teachers may consult their peers in the staff room or during training meetings, read up about what it is that intrigues or interests them, or even attend teacher training workshops with a focus on this area. Having given the concept some thought, they may then decide to try something new in their lesson, such as a different teaching technique or alter their teaching practice in a particular way. Once teachers deliver their lesson with the alteration in their teaching practice, which may be a different teaching technique, they then reflect on the effect or effects the intervention in their teaching might have had. So far, this sounds very much like the reflective model which encourages teachers to continuously engage in a self-reflective cycle of planning a change, implementing the change in the lesson, and thinking about the effects or results; a repetition of the process with perhaps a modified change every time leads to the cycle of development. Action research takes the cyclical process of planning, teaching, observation and reflection further by calling for the teachers conducting the research to plan, document and share it with the wider teaching community. The reflective model can be seen to be very much a personal and private mode of research, whereas the action research model contributes to the great body of research and development. So while the concept of conducting research might
4. Teachers are intrigued by an aspect of their teaching or their students’ learning.

5. Teachers put the plan into action. The intervention (change/modification) is implemented.

3. They may discuss this with their peers, read up about it, and/or attend a workshop on it. They decide to implement a change in their teaching.

6. Teachers gather their data using the methods laid out in their plan.

7. Teachers analyse the data and write up and disseminate the findings.

8. Teachers conclude the research, repeat it, or continue the cycle with a revised plan and a new intervention.

**FIGURE 1: ACTION RESEARCH STAGES**

1. Teachers devise a plan of action and come up with: (a) a research question, (b) an intervention (change/modification), and (c) methods of data collection.

2. They think about what it is that intrigues them and explore the notion.

3. They may discuss this with their peers, read up about it, and/or attend a workshop on it. They decide to implement a change in their teaching.

4. Teachers are intrigued by an aspect of their teaching or their students’ learning.

5. Teachers put the plan into action. The intervention (change/modification) is implemented.

6. Teachers gather their data using the methods laid out in their plan.

7. Teachers analyse the data and write up and disseminate the findings.

8. Teachers conclude the research, repeat it, or continue the cycle with a revised plan and a new intervention.
initially seem daunting for teachers, action research is really no more than what
the reflective teacher already does, the difference being that it is planned, written
down, and shared with other members of the community.

THE ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE

Figure 1 attempts to provide a visual representation of the stages of action research
and its cyclical process. The preparation cycle shows a possible preparation stage
where teachers have an enquiry about their teaching, which they may explore
further by consulting colleagues and possibly reading up about the area (steps 1–3).
Having gone through this reflective process and assuming they would like to carry
out a concrete study using the action research model, teachers develop a plan of
action (step 4): they refine their enquiry into a research question; come up with
an intervention that will effect a change in their teaching; and think about ways
to collect data with the aim of providing answers to the research question. In the
implementation cycle, the plan is put into action (steps 5–7): the intervention, such
as a change in a teaching technique, is implemented in the lesson; the methods
of data gathering are carried out according to the plan; the data is collected and
analysed; and the findings are written up. The teachers conducting the research
decide whether to end the research there, to repeat the process for validity, or to
continue the cycle with a revised plan and a modified intervention (step 8). There
may be many cycles and many revised plans before the research is concluded.

FINDING AN AREA OF INTEREST

Teachers might get ideas for conducting action research directly from the
classroom and what happens during their lessons, or they may be inspired by a
training session or an article they have read. Many ideas are generated in the staff
room during lesson breaks with discussions on what has just worked really well in
the classroom as well as what has not, and ways for it to work better are often a
topic of conversation. Burns (2010) talks about finding a problem in the classroom
and has some good suggestions for coming up with ideas such as having teacher
focus groups and using activities such as keeping a diary and techniques such as
brainstorming. Teachers who are looking for an area to research might explore
areas of interest together in focus groups (Burns, 2010, pp. 28–29). Brainstorming
ideas around a central topic using a mind map can lead to a particular area of
focus. Teachers may want to consider whether the effects of a particular teaching
technique work the same or differently with different groups. One way of finding
an area of interest is to keep a diary or a record of what is intriguing in the
classroom; another technique is for teachers to keep a list of things they would
like to know more about. Teachers may be able to observe their peers in action
and focus on particular classroom situations, or conduct a survey with them on
hot teaching issues (Burns, 2013). Once an area of interest has been established, teachers may conduct their research individually or collaboratively with fellow teachers or mentors assisting in such processes as gathering and analysing data. Teachers may choose to collaborate by working on the same action research project in their separate classrooms, collating data using the same data collection methods, and comparing the findings.

A POSSIBLE PREPARATION STRATEGY

What follows is a possible model to assist teachers in the preparation stage, namely: (a) developing a research question, (b) identifying an intervention, and (c) designing methods of data collection. Once the following strategy is complete, teachers are ready to put it into action and can carry out steps 5 to 7 in the implementation cycle outlined in Figure 1 above.

Develop a research question
Burns (2010) talks about identifying a “problem” in the classroom or “problematising” a situation (p. 2). Borg (2011) points out the negative associations tied to the word “problem” and suggests the use of another word – “issue” (p. 485). For the purposes of this paper, my choice of word is “question”. After having identified an area of interest, teachers identify a question and explore all aspects of the particular topic in order to refine their research question. It is imperative that the research question is not too broad in its interpretation. Teachers must be able to fully answer the question at hand and should therefore ensure to narrow down their research question so that it is measureable and specific. A research question that aims to measure the effectiveness of error correction is far too broad as there are too many different potentials and variables. On the other hand, a research question that aims to measure the effectiveness of end-of-task class correction as opposed to on-the-spot teacher correction is more specific and measureable.

Introduce an intervention
Action research is about research and development. Measuring what is usually practised in the classroom is a start; however, measuring the changes and effects of that which is different to what is normally practiced is a move towards development. An intervention is a modification that teachers implement in their lessons in order to trigger a difference that they can measure in answer to their research question. An intervention could be a different teaching technique or a change in the way they conduct a specific aspect of their lesson. To come up with an intervention, teachers may read up about the focus of their research question, consult other teachers or mentors, or gather some evidence from their own classroom.
Design methods of data collection

In order to reliably measure difference there needs to be concrete evidence. As part of the planning process, teachers conducting action research need to consider how they will collect the data. Methods of data collection must be purposeful to the research question and are likely to be mostly qualitative, but may also be quantitative. Burns (2010) distinguishes between methods of data collection that are observational – teacher’s observations – and non-observational – participants’ experience. Observational ways of gathering information include: keeping a diary, drawing diagrams, making notes, recording parts of lessons, and taking photos. Non-observational data include: surveys, interviews, narratives, and focus groups. Burns (2010) advises using several methods to collect data in any given action research project in order to have as complete a picture as possible. At this stage, teachers must decide whether they are going to work individually or collaboratively, and whether they will need any assistance. Whenever collecting data for research, teachers must always get the go-ahead from the school where they intend to conduct the research and written consent from their students; if the students are underage, parental consent is required.

Sample situation

The following is a fictitious situation described in simple terms to exemplify the above preparation strategy. A teacher notices that the same few students in the class do not participate much during group speaking activities and would like to investigate the situation. The teacher decides to gather some evidence to verify whether this is really the case. The teacher gets the go-ahead from the school, explains the exercise to the students in a manner that does not compromise the task and obtains their consent. Since the students are in small groups for the speaking activities which happen simultaneously, audio recording will not work, so the teacher brings in some colleagues to observe specific groups and note down the timings of individual student talk time. The results validate the teacher’s suspicions. The teacher explores all possible factors such as whether the students have the necessary language skills to participate in the task, whether they understand the instructions, whether the topics and activities are suitable for the student description, or whether it is a matter of personality as some students might be reluctant speakers. The teacher narrows it down to willingness and reluctance and considers ways to encourage the reluctant speakers to speak more. The teacher thinks that specific group patterns that match speakers’ willingness or reluctance might encourage more participation from the more reluctant speakers and develops a research question based on this idea. As an intervention, the teacher plans to use specific grouping patterns matching students according to degree of participation in the next lesson. The teacher already has an idea for a second intervention consisting of giving students more structured cues for guidance during speaking activities; however, the teacher deems it worthwhile
to see whether specific groupings will make a difference first, so this second intervention is planned for possibly the next cycle. The teacher considers methods of data collection and decides to bring in the same observers to take note of individual student talk time which will be measured against the previous timings. The teacher will also ask students to complete questionnaires and conduct interviews with individual students. The plan is ready to be implemented as per steps 5 to 8 in Figure 1.

WHY PERFORM ACTION RESEARCH?

The benefits of action research affect teachers, their students, and the schools they work for. The process of having teachers looking at their own teaching and their students’ learning more closely is likely to have a positive effect on teaching if just by increasing teachers’ situational awareness. The scientific approach of action research validates what teachers think happens, or does not, in the classroom, answers the enquiring mind, and may prompt further research and study. The cyclical nature of action research encourages an environment of continued reflection and development. Many teachers who have conducted action research have found it to be motivational and self-empowering. A teacher’s reflection after conducting action research in oral testing attests to this:

I have certainly acquired new tools, and, above all, a greater awareness of my being a teacher. Observing and analysing...have made me see more clearly the asymmetric nature of classroom communication. As a result, I now feel more in control of what happens during an oral test. (as cited in Burns, 2010, p. 4)

Action research is teacher-driven – it is conducted by teachers and shared with the wider teaching community. Ways of sharing action research locally include presenting it at a training event such as a teacher training workshop, or publishing it in a newsletter or a journal for teachers. More than reflective, action research strives to help the teaching community develop and grow in the field.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented a brief description of the workings of action research, its cyclical development, and its differentiation from the reflective model; however, its focus lies on the preparation stage before teachers put their plan into action. It has been written with the intention to offer some guidance to teachers who have not carried out any research before but might be interested in starting up an action research project of their own. Using a model split into three parts to develop a plan – developing a research question, introducing an intervention, and
designing methods of data collection – this paper, therefore, presents a strategy for the preparation stage and provides teachers with a sample situation of how it would be applied. The model provides teachers with a framework to devise a plan of action for the implementation stage of the action research cycle.

larissa.jonk@gmail.com
REFERENCES


Language teachers’ perceptions of doing teacher research: a Maltese case study

Kenan Dikilitaş and Koray Akyazı
Gediz University, Turkey

This paper presents different forms of teacher research that language teachers are engaged in doing particularly for their professional development. The study discusses the distinctive differences as well as commonalities among three forms of teacher research. For this purpose, written reports collected from 34 Maltese EFL teachers and trainers were analyzed according to the beliefs they held regarding what teacher research is. The study concludes that teacher research is perceived as a professional development activity which may have positive and negative aspects, where the former outnumber the latter. In addition, this activity is seen as a strategy that may promote language teaching beliefs and practices and is quite relevant to what teachers are doing in the classroom. The major implications include the fact that teacher researchers think that they should develop adequate skills for doing research for professional development.
INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a shift from teacher training to teacher development and an approach to professional development (Mann, 2005). Teacher research can be seen as one of several professional development activities, which focuses on teacher development through researching one’s own beliefs and practices in the classroom. The aim of this study was to introduce teachers to what teacher research is and facilitate their exploration into the motivations for doing teacher research. By teachers being given the chance to explore their unique contexts, personal beliefs, and practices with learners or colleagues, teachers may take steps to making more informed choices in what they do in the class, why they do it, and how to improve what they do if needed. Becoming a teacher researcher is no simple matter and it requires great care if it is to be done effectively. Therefore, a long path is proposed before improving classroom practice and ultimately the learning currently seen in the classroom. The study aims to report on the responses of the participants regarding how they perceived teacher research and what their reasons for involvement in teacher research were and what they expected to learn from the process of doing teacher research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher research is an integrative strategy for teachers in their pursuit of professional development. Borg (2014) states that, through the involvement of teacher research, teachers not only have the chance to develop the quality of practice but also improve their sense of professionalism. Henson (2001) also highlighted the role of action research in promoting teacher efficacy, thus giving autonomy to teachers to decide and govern their own instructional decisions. This is closely linked to Bandura’s (1977) theory on self-efficacy points out that people’s efficacy can be developed by a number of sources of influence. The most influential source of these beliefs is the mastery experience. When individuals believe that they have what it takes to succeed, they may develop a strong sense of efficacy. When they encounter difficulties or setbacks, teachers will know that they can be successful through perseverance. The perception that one’s teaching has been successful increases efficacy beliefs raising expectations that future performances will be successful. So through systematic engagement in teacher research, teachers will gain self-confidence in their practice and improve practical teaching skills and strategies.

From a broader perspective, Ryan and Deci’s (2000) self-determination theory explains the interrelation between self-efficacy and teacher autonomy. They stress the key role of intrinsic motivation with special reference to functional differences between two different types of motivation, namely intrinsic and extrinsic. In relation to the role of motivation that comes from inside and made by the internal drive of the teacher, Borg (2014) also argues for the need for teachers to specify
and determine their own professional development needs as opposed to external top down intervention. This sense of autonomy also adds to teachers’ sense of self-efficacy. One fundamental argument underpinning this requirement is that teachers’ research engagement, as well as their pedagogical decisions informed by research, will benefit both their teaching and their students’ learning (Hargreaves, 1999). There has been an increased interest in self-study of practice in recent times. In some cases this appears to be related to the development of Schön’s (1987) ideas about reflection on practice. Munby and Russell (1994) have furthered these ideas to highlight the ‘authority of experience’ as a source of knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning. There is also a realization that there is no educational change without people change. Therefore, by focusing on personal practice and experience, teachers may undertake genuine inquiry that leads to a better understanding of the complexities of teaching and learning.

Although the concept of research practice may seem clear, it is used here as an umbrella term that includes teachers’ research engagement, attitudes, motivations, perceptions, and the contexts in which their research is based. There is an increasing body of work that has explored language teachers’ research activities, and what their perceptions of research are. For example, Borg (2009) reported that teachers perceive teacher research as a scientific form of research rather than a professional activity that could relate to classroom context. This misconception of teacher research may be seen as an obstacle that prevents teachers from engaging in teacher research as they feel they lack the academic and scientific skills believed necessary for teacher research. Borg (2010) talks about engagement with research as being reading and using the work of others, whilst engagement in research refers to teachers actually doing their own teacher research projects. He states that to encourage teachers to be engaged in and with teacher research, a shift in teacher attitudes, knowledge, and skills is necessary, together with a change in institutional conditions.

Dikilitaş (2014) gathered data about perceptions of teacher research from preparatory English teachers engaged in teacher research over a period of two years. Teachers talked about how it integrates theory with practice in their own contexts by giving them the chance to experiment with theory in their own class to see what impact the theory has on their teaching practice. An increase in self-awareness was also a key theme, where the focus was on the individual personally benefiting in a meaningful way. Teachers commented on how it made them more aware of their own professional development, giving them a sense of autonomy that is often not felt in workshops or seminars. However, there is literature (Zeuli, 1994) that shows teachers’ non-integrative conception of teacher research as a transformative tool. Zeuli (1994) discovered that many teachers were engaged with teacher research with the aim of finding ideas to utilize in the classroom. He found that there was a focus of the product of research as opposed to the process of gaining knowledge and understanding. Elements of this concept of teacher research emerged to some extent from the participants of this study. But
more generally, some of the major benefits that may be gained from engagement in teacher research are depicted in the table below.

TABLE 1: BENEFITS OF DOING TEACHER RESEARCH
(ADAPTED FROM KINCHELOE, 2003)

- Begin to understand the power implications of technical standards
- Appreciate the benefits of research
- Begin to understand what they know from experience
- Become more aware of how they can contribute to educational research
- Be seen as ‘learners’ rather than ‘functionaries’ who follow top-down orders
- Explore the learning processes occurring in their classrooms and interpret them
- Reverse the trend toward the deskillling of teachers

As can be seen from the above table, TR empowers the teacher to take control of his or her own personal and professional development. Teachers, with a thorough awareness of their own teaching context, together with informed theory, are best placed to make their own judgments about what happens in the classroom.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Participants**
There were 34 participants in the study and mainly from a Maltese background, predominately working in the private language school sector. Teachers, teacher trainers, head of departments, and material developers with years of teaching experience ranging from 3 to 25 years chose to take part in the workshop in order to learn more about what teacher research is, and how it may be done.

**Data collection tools**
The data on which this study is based was collected throughout a workshop run in Malta in October, 2014. The participants of the workshops engaged in exploring and thinking before the hands-on activities. In those sessions, they discussed the following questions in groups of 6-8. The first of these included participants’ beliefs and perceptions about teacher research. Each group was asked to write responses on a piece of paper. The second required them to discuss the constraints and limitations of doing teacher research. The collaboratively generated written data was then submitted at the end of the workshop.

**Data analysis**
The collected data was read in order to explore it and have a general sense of it (Agar, 1986). Later, it was coded by segmenting and labelling the text in order to obtain categories and broad themes (Creswell, 2005). During the coding process a total of 62 codes were induced from the written documents, which were then reduced to 32 categories when overlapping ones were excluded. Later these 32
categories were gathered under 7 central themes, which helped us form an idea in the database. The induction of codes and themes from the data were treated by the two researchers to ensure interrelated reliability. The researchers agreed on all themes which are reported in the findings section.

**FINDINGS**

This study aims to discuss the beliefs of teachers and trainers about teacher research. In other words, how teacher research is perceived as a professional development strategy in the Maltese context. This could help discuss research as a process of teacher learning in an ESL context where English functions as an official language.

**RQ1: What are the teachers’ beliefs about teacher research?**

The participants were asked to discuss their beliefs about what teacher research is. The responses were tabulated below. Seven major themes can be summarized as follows:

- Teacher research as learner-based
- Teacher research as promoting classroom practices
- Teacher research as a way of building collaboration
- Teacher research as a way of developing teacher autonomy
- Teacher research as a continuous professional development activity
- Teacher research as a way of changing beliefs and attitudes
- Teacher research as a problem-solution activity

**MAJOR THEMES**

**Teacher research as learner-based**

Five responses provided by the participants relate directly to the fact that teacher research is research carried out for the needs and preferences of students in the classroom. The responses are shown in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>STUDENTS’ NEEDS AND PREFERENCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Research driven by students’ needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Trying out new things in the classroom and adapting to your students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Meets specific student needs better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A way of considering learner perceptions and expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Not necessary to be teacher-based</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These responses indicate one of the critical functions of teacher research as a way of integrating students’ perspectives into the classroom. In this way, a learner-
centred and learner-sensitive classroom context may be created, which supports the learning process of learners as their needs are taken into consideration. Students are seen as an integral part of developing classroom instruction through such classroom-oriented research studies carried out by teachers.

**Teacher research as promoting classroom practices**

15 responses, some of which are listed below, centred on ensuring innovation in classroom practices. Teacher research is seen as a strategy to develop understanding, production, exploration, and practice of new ways of teaching. As teacher research is a form of research carried out in the classroom context, which involves classroom dynamics including teachers’ classroom practices, it is inevitable to observe an interaction between what teachers do and how they develop what they do.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3: INNOVATION IN CLASSROOM PRACTICES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Implementing innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Understanding how to incorporate something new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Looking for new ideas on how to teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Feeds back into classroom practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Is practice-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. To produce new ways for self-development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. To explore new pedagogies and methodologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Should encourage experimentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Relevant to teaching and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Studying anything related to teaching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above listed chunks of phrases focus on the anticipated impact of doing teacher research on the practices carried out in the classroom. They also show that teacher research is closely related to teaching with a sense of a constant quest for innovative ideas. Moreover, it is also seen as a bridge between theory and practice or practice and theory. The process of researching teaching and learning may lead them to explore the theoretical principles behind their practices, which could contribute to their understandings.

**Teacher research as a way of building up collaboration**

The participants also reported that they perceived teacher research as a way of building relations with other colleagues. This aspect is crucial because teacher learning should be promoted in a school context characterized by teachers’ similar experiences, whereby they can find better solutions to the teaching and learning problems that may occur in their classroom.
Another aspect that is highlighted is the need for a mentor who provides support during the research process. This could be explained by the lack of knowledge of how it could be carried out. Colleagues are seen as sources of feedback and discussion, whereas mentors are seen as source of expertise and guidance.

**Teacher research as a way of developing teacher autonomy**
Teacher research is also seen as a private act which can be carried out by teachers for their own use. As it is individually carried out, it is thought that it may function as a strategy to develop teacher autonomy and empower teachers’ research and teaching processes.

**Teacher research as a continuing professional development activity**
Teacher research is also seen as a professional development activity that is carried out over a period of time as opposed to one-shot teacher training sessions, which focus on the transmission of knowledge and skills by an expert directly or indirectly.

---

**TABLE 4: COLLABORATION**

1. Get new ideas from peers
2. Getting and providing feedback
3. A mentor can guide us to discover more
4. Should be supported by mentoring
5. Getting support from other colleagues
6. Transferable to other teachers

---

**TABLE 5: TEACHER AUTONOMY**

1. Initiative
2. Customized
3. Autonomy
4. Not always mentored
5. Should promote learning autonomy
6. Teacher-owned

---

**TABLE 6: CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

1. Continuing
2. Ongoing process
3. Learning centered not training centered
4. Beneficial and useful in the long run
Another idea implied in the responses is that it promotes teacher learning not through traditional training given by a trainer, but through individual engagement in doing teacher research. It is also believed that the impact of doing teacher research is not an immediately emerging one but one evident in the long run. This is because teachers learn from their own research and implement or behave accordingly in their classroom and monitor change and development.

**Teacher research as a way of changing beliefs and attitudes**

Some of the responses concentrated on the impact of doing teacher research on beliefs and attitudes. Participants expected to change their understandings of teaching and learning as a result of research findings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 7: CHANGING BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Change in ingrained beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It challenges your intuitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Learning to be open to change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is also implied that research may provide teachers with evidence or justification for teacher change through which they promote new attitudes for being open to change and development.

**Teacher research as a problem-solution activity**

Responses also show that teacher research is perceived to be a way of promoting specific knowledge in a particular area of teaching and learning and helps teachers improve themselves where they are weak.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 8: PROBLEM-SOLUTION ACTIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Based on a question or a problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Results from a gap in personal knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Answers your questions and expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Teacher research strengthens weaknesses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher research is also understood as an activity that can empower teachers to develop solutions to the pedagogical problems they encounter or to address weaknesses in teaching.

**RQ2: What are the constraints and limitations of doing teacher research?**

The responses provided by the participants highlighted that teacher research could also be questioned in terms of the challenges and influence on the teacher, though they do not outnumber the positive aspects highlighted above. Table 9
shows the reported questions and disadvantageous aspects. The participants had questions about the impact on the teacher, the challenges and difficulties of doing research, coupled with knowledge of how to do it, time, cost and effort required.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 9: CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the end result?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It requires commitment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are teachers too busy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally unpaid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reported limitations are among the most often cited ones in the teacher research literature. The participants questioned the impact of doing teacher research on what they do. This could be related to their confidence in their research competence. When not equipped to do research, teachers may not feel confident in the results. They also questioned the effort put into the work and benefit gained out of it, which is also related to time and cost issues.

**RQ3: What are the expectations of the participants from participating in a workshop on teacher research?**

The participants’ responses centred around four major expectations from the workshop. These consisted of developing practical ideas, developing knowledge of teacher research, developing research competence, and promoting professional development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 10: DEVELOPING KNOWLEDGE OF TEACHER RESEARCH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Improve research skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Insight into methodology and content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How to plan and carry out TR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. To learn more about the practice of TR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Explore TR from different perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Some knowledge of TR in other contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. To learn more about TR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Understand how to do TR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Learn more about TR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Learn different types of TR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Hands-on tips for doing TR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Knowledge on how to carry out TR: guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. How to set up TR online learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. New ideas for information on TR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Better understand aspects of TR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. To learn more about TR applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Evaluate the alternatives of TR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Hope to get practical ideas for implementing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. How to begin research on online teaching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As may be interpreted from the descriptive sentences, there seems to be a focus on gaining a firmer grasp of what teacher research is and how it may be implemented in the classroom.

**TABLE 11: PROMOTING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

1. Get ideas to promote personal development
2. Develop myself as a DoS, facilitating teachers’ development
3. Be a better teacher by becoming more self-critical
4. Innovative strategies for development
5. Learn more about teacher development
6. Explore areas of interest
7. Pass benefits onto others involved in TR

This group of teachers viewed TR as a device for both their own professional development, and the development of the teachers they work with.

**TABLE 12: GAINING PRACTICAL IDEAS**

1. To find innovative ways of exploring and improving learners’ learning experience
2. Ideas for classroom application
3. For TR direct benefits for classroom
4. Learn about motivating students
5. To learn new methods of teaching
6. New ideas

Teacher research as an instrumental tool was the key theme that emerged from this group of comments. Teachers here saw TR as a product rather than a process of development. They expected to see direct applications of teaching that could be implemented in their own classrooms.

**TABLE 13: DEVELOPING RESEARCH COMPETENCE**

1. Hope to get inspiration for my PDR assignment
2. Help with research for DipTESOL

Two of the participants were at the time doing a Diploma in TESOL, so they expected to gain further insight into TR with the aim of improving their research skills as opposed to classroom inquiry.
DISCUSSION

In response to the study’s first research question, this paper has discussed the beliefs and perceptions of 34 language teachers and trainers regarding teacher research. From the analysis of the data, the following seven themes related to teacher research engagement were induced: a learner-based activity, promoting classroom practices, building collaboration, developing teacher autonomy, a continuing activity, changing beliefs and attitudes, and a problem-solution activity. The participants pointed particularly to practical, social, cognitive and pragmatic aspects of potential impact of research engagement. These aspects show that they perceived teacher research engagement as a powerful strategy for their development by indicating that they may go through a variety of change processes as a result of active involvement. This view of teacher research as a developmental strategy is in line with the shift from the traditional top-down approach to teacher training, where knowledge and good practice is imposed by experts who may not have a true understanding of the context teachers may be working in. Teacher research is grounded in a constructivist theory of learning pioneered by the work of Bruner, Piaget and Vygotsky, who support knowledge as being self or co-constructed as opposed to being discovered in external sources.

However, some participants reported several questions and obstacles in relation to research engagement, which include unclear impact of research engagement, the difficulty of the process, teachers’ limited research competence, the effort invested in the work in relation to time, and a lack of incentive in return for the work accomplished. These concerns should be taken into consideration by policy makers and school directors who may support teacher research as a professional development tool. It is clear that teacher researchers put a great deal of effort into research, which also requires sufficient time, academic, financial or motivational support that can be offered through incentives and promotion.

kenandikilitas@gmail.com
koray.akyazi@gediz.edu.tr
REFERENCES


An ELT teacher’s reflective journey: a bottom-up approach to continuing professional development

Caroline Campbell
Easy School of Languages, Malta

Teachers often feel that professional development is being ‘imposed’ on them and find that the training provided sometimes fails to meet their real needs and expectations. It must also be said that often the busy schedule that teachers follow and the amount of work that they put into lesson preparation does not leave space for much reflection. Reflective practice is often looked upon as a daunting task and mentors who promote this rarely get enthusiastic reactions from teachers. However, the practice of writing reflections about teaching and learning practices as well as teachers’ own beliefs and attitudes towards teaching can help them make more informed decisions about the type of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) they should seek and engage in. This paper outlines a process that helps teachers start or continue their reflective journey as professionals who want to take ownership of their own CPD.
RATIONALE

This article is a reaction to a set of responses given by a group of ELT teachers during a semi-structured interview in a small-scale study on the use of teacher portfolios for CPD purposes (Xerri & Campbell, 2015). When asked to give their opinion about reflective writing, teachers expressed concerns about the writing skills necessary to produce written reflection, the awkwardness of having to write about oneself and the uncertainty of not knowing the exact purpose of writing self-reflection and who its readers will be. Following this feedback, I started reflecting back on my own personal experience and realized the importance that reflective practice, in particular reflective writing, has had on my professional career, especially since it saved me from teacher burnout after just a few years of teaching. It was through reflective practice that I identified my strengths and weaknesses as an ELT teacher and the areas I lacked or needed more training in. In the long run, it was also through reflective practice that I found where my true interests lie. In this paper I will outline the benefits of reflective practice, in particular reflective writing, as a tool that helps ELT teachers find a way to reflect on their attitudes, beliefs and practices, as they move towards taking ownership of their CPD. I will also point out the concerns that teachers usually have when it comes to writing down their reflections and I offer some suggestions that might help mitigate these concerns. I will then focus on how reflective practice can be applied to the classroom, how teachers can involve their students and colleagues in their reflective journey and even take it beyond their immediate environment. At intervals I include reflective tasks with questions that might serve as prompts to help readers reflect on their own reflective journey as ELT professionals.

TAKING OWNERSHIP OF CPD

Teachers engage in CPD to acquire knowledge, to learn how to learn and to turn their knowledge into classroom practice for the benefit of their students (Avalos, 2011). Since this is fundamental to a teacher’s career, it is important that they choose to engage in CPD that helps them in this feat. However, “not every form of professional development, even those with the greatest evidence of positive impact, is of itself relevant to all teachers” (Avalos, 2011, p. 10). What I would like to point out here is the importance of taking a conscious decision when choosing what CPD would truly be of benefit along one’s journey as an ELT professional. Nevertheless, CPD is more often than not ‘imposed’ on teachers by the school management, “policymakers (who...seem to know little of teaching or learning) or professional bodies who, in all good faith, act...to ensure performativity and standardization of teaching and learning across the sector” (Rushton & Suter, 2012, p. 8). It is often these entities themselves that propose and ‘invite’ teachers to attend specific conferences or workshops and in turn teachers feel obliged to
attend them, only to feel very disappointed as they find out that the CPD they engaged in did not tally with their interests or needs. At this point the question is whether teachers do reflect on their choice of CPD before getting themselves involved or to what extent they do so.

**REFLECTIVE TASK 1:**

- Why do you attend conferences?
- Do you usually attend conferences out of your own free will?
- Do you reflect on which workshops and presentations you would like to attend at a conference?

Based on personal experience, engaging in reflective practice effectively leads to making informed decisions about what type of CPD to take up. Interests, weaknesses, strengths, needs and so on become clearer as teachers reflect and “initiate the process to inform themselves by investigating their practices and beliefs so that they can construct their own theories of teaching and learning” (Farrell, 2013, p. 15). Chin-Win (2012) points out that “Reflection involves teachers’ thinking analytically about their past and current teaching beliefs, experience and practice” (p. 132). Once teachers start doing this, they are more likely to engage in CPD from the bottom-up approach, doing what is relevant to their needs and eventually benefitting from it. Moreover, from journal entries, Genc (2010) found that “teachers developed bottom-up teaching strategies based on the dynamics of their classrooms through critical reflection in journals because they were able to explore, analyze and observe their own beliefs and classroom practices, and experiment with alternative instructional behaviours” (p. 402).

**REFLECTIVE TASK 2:**

- What made you read this article? Was it the title, the abstract or something else?
- What was your first reaction when you read the abstract?
- In what way do you expect this article to help you?
- How willing are you today to start/continue your reflective journey as an ELT professional?

**THE CHALLENGES OF REFLECTIVE WRITING**

Reflective journal writing is probably the most common reflective procedure used among teachers (Abednia et al., 2013). It can be “an integral part of the reflective process, and it is more often than not a requirement on an initial teacher training course to keep a reflective journal on one’s professional practice” (Rushton & Suter, 2012, p. 20). However, reflective writing should not be a task that is used only by novice teachers during training (Borg, 2001). A teacher’s journal or a diary
can become a tool that can be used throughout an ELT professional's entire career. Novice teachers use reflective practice to tweak their beliefs and practices but more experienced teachers should use it to transform them (McGregor & Cartwright, 2011). Genc (2010) reports that “writing in journals helped teachers become more aware of the needs and problems specific to their teaching contexts” (p. 402). She adds that it is “a kind of eye-opener because teachers felt empowered and autonomous in their classroom practices when they implemented self-initiated pedagogical options” (Genc, 2010, p. 402).

REFLECTIVE TASK 3:

- How often do you reflect about your classroom practices and your attitudes and beliefs as a teacher?
- Do you keep a written record of your reflections? If yes, how do you do this?
- If not, what do you think might be the benefits of self-reflection and keeping a written record of it?

This is not to say that engaging in reflective writing is an easy endeavour nor that teachers will readily find time to write their reflections. Teachers are busy people and often find it hard to make an effort to stop and reflect. Chin-Wen (2012) points out that “the two biggest challenges in writing a journal for reflective practice were time constraints and the lack of the analysis in journal entries about better classroom practice” (p. 131). Teachers are often concerned about writing in general and feel that they lack ideas and do not know what to write about (Xerri & Campbell, 2015). An additional concern is fear of being assessed by a mentor on their writing skills; teachers also agonize over the true purpose of this task. Teachers might even think that it might jeopardize their employment and this often results in a halo effect as they will only write what they think their mentors want to read. The task might also become too time consuming and daunting if teachers are too concerned with finding the right words. Teachers might also be reluctant to reveal their own weaknesses or failures when writing about their classroom practices. Another concern is that their written reflections might be made accessible to other ELT professionals or colleagues who might judge them. Finally, given the well-known fact that teachers are not well paid, they might also lack the motivation to invest time and effort into improving themselves as professionals.

If this is the way teachers look upon the task of reflective writing, a change of heart will be essential before they can start benefitting from it. They need to start looking at reflective writing as an opportunity to stop for a while and slow down all the different thoughts in their head and try to make some sense out of them (Farrell, 2013). Reflective writing can take various forms, and teachers may opt for a freer or a more structured form of writing. Rushton and Suter (2012) indicate that teachers find it helpful to have a structured approach, especially
when reflective writing is new to them. They suggest that teachers should reflect on their classroom practice, revise their practice, and reflect again. Following such a cycle will help teachers become fluent in reflective writing and gain confidence. Moreover, “to ensure that the efficacy of the changes can be properly evaluated... it is important that the introduction of changes is carefully planned” (Rushton & Suter, 2012, p. 18).

However, having to pay too much attention to the way reflections are written might need a certain amount of effort. Farrell (2013) suggests that teachers should see writing not as a finished product but as a process that helps them discover their thoughts. It would be a good idea if mentors encouraged teachers “to voice their opinions freely, analyze their teaching beliefs and values critically, and, as a result, refine them constructively” (Abednia et al., 2013, p. 511). Mentors should provide training and support to help teachers face the challenges of reflective writing, and provide feedback. However, “once the teacher has received advice or feedback from a tutor or a mentor it is incumbent upon them to reflect on how what has been suggested can actually be integrated into professional practice” (Rushton & Suter, 2012, p. 101).

**REFLECTIVE TASK 4:**

- How do you feel about writing, in general?
- How do you feel about writing down reflections on your teaching?
- How important do you think writing your reflections is for your CPD?
- What forms of reflective writing do you already engage in?
- What forms of reflective writing would you like to start doing?

ELT professionals already do a lot of writing in their everyday lives. This is not necessarily strictly reflective practice but it can be used to reflect on classroom practice as well as attitudes and beliefs. Lesson plans, writing class reports, marking students’ work, designing course units and so on are all forms of writing that involve thinking, reflecting and evaluating (Burton, 2009) and that can contribute towards reflective writing. Reflections can be recorded in different forms. Teachers just need to find the form that is the most feasible for them, a style they like, one that will not burden them. They might also want to consider the amount of time they have available and opt for something that is achievable in that span of time. For instance, using technology might make writing easier and more accessible. Burton (2009) suggests various types of journal writing, including personal, dialogue, online and small-group journals, autobiographies, on-line discussion boards and free writing. To this list, Cartwright (2011) adds pieces of academic writing for assignments, written lesson evaluations, and written reviews of progress before meeting with a mentor.
Engaging in reflective practice as I have presented it so far constitutes the first two out of the four stages identified by Farrell (2013):

- Engaging in reflective practice.
- Noticing what is going on in the classroom.
- Involving students and colleagues.
- Sharing ideas with other ELT professionals. (pp. 23–24)

The next natural stage is to involve students and colleagues and take self-reflection beyond the classroom doors.

**TAKING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE INTO THE CLASSROOM AND INVOLVING STUDENTS AND COLLEAGUES**

According to Rushton and Suter (2012), “the teacher may work in isolation from colleagues for much of the time” (p. 101). However, most reflective practice has to do “with thinking, mediating or pondering over the learning process and one of the best sources of material for reflection is to ask the students” (Rushton & Suter, 2012, p. 6); it “can include the consideration of others’ perspectives” (Rushton & Suter, 2012, p. 101).

**REFLECTIVE TASK 5:**

- What are my students learning? How are my students learning?
- What do my students think about me as a teacher?
- What are my students’ preferred learning styles and strategies?
- What are my students’ real needs?
- What would my students’ rather be doing in class?

Reflective writing is very personal but it can be more beneficial when shared with colleagues. Trainers and mentors can encourage teachers to exchange their written reflections with peers especially during training (Abednia et al., 2013). This might reduce teachers’ fear of being ‘assessed’ by a trainer or mentor and the teachers will be less cautious and reserved and more genuine when writing their reflections (Abednia et al., 2013). Burton et al. (2009) affirm that

Reflective writing about teaching is a way of inviting others into our classrooms to see what is going on there and to think about the ramifications of certain problems and successes. Teaching can be an isolated and isolating experience. Reflective writing about teaching is a way of expanding our world beyond the individual classroom. (p. 2)
Borg (2001) suggests that besides allowing teachers to get an insight into their practice, once made public, written reflections will also be beneficial to readers. In addition, “if teachers share their reflections, they can attain different perspectives about their work from the reflections of others” (Farrell, 2013, p. 97). However, others might suggest a list of things to do as a quick fix if the teacher is not well-prepared to weigh the feedback received from peers. For this reason, Heslop and Devlin (2011) suggest that teachers should do some initial self-reflection before asking peers for feedback because this will help them make the best out of support networks.

Colleagues can be involved in many different ways. Reflections can be simply shared or discussed in the staff room or in specifically organized meetings. Burton (2005) points out various ways of how writing can be shared, for instance, one-to-one, in focus groups during pre-service training, between groups, and by email to mention a few. Teachers can even ask colleagues they trust or mentors to give them feedback on their written reflections or ask colleagues about the methodologies they use or else carry out peer observations. Coaching or mentoring a novice teacher can also contribute towards the experienced teachers’ reflective practice.

**TAKING REFLECTIVE WRITING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM**

Reflective writing can be taken a step further. Burton et al. (2009) mention that it can also be “a powerful personal resource that encourages teachers not only to write but to communicate about teaching outside their immediate educational setting” (p. iv). They also suggest that teachers might want to use their reflective writing to reach other teachers around the world. Burton (2005) mentions that this can be done by publishing books or posting written work on websites. Borg (2001) adds that when teachers read other teachers’ reflections they may understand their own work better as they see it in the light of their peers’ experience.

Moreover, “teachers who do become researchers or reflective practitioners face another responsibility: writing up their research so that their learning is not lost to the profession” (Burton, 2005, p. 1). However, as I mentioned earlier, most teachers are already concerned about their writing skills let alone engaging in academic writing and following strict writing guidelines and editing their written work to publish it. Teachers may also argue that in academic writing their voice is denied (Burton, 2005). Additionally, publishing articles or books is often seen as something that can only be done by academics and hence teachers feel that their own reflections will not be good enough for publishing. This is unfortunate because if teachers fail to communicate their reflections, a wealth of knowledge and insight will be lost.

Nevertheless, I am not suggesting here that journal writing will automatically
lead to academic writing, publishing material, writing books and so on. However, I would like to emphasize the importance of sharing one’s work with other professionals working in the same field. Sharing in this sense can take various forms, such as organizing an in-service training session at one’s own school, giving a presentation or a workshop at a local or an international conference, writing for an association’s newsletter or a teachers’ magazine, and using an online blog, website or social networking site where ideas can be discussed with other teachers who form part of one’s personal learning network (Xerri, 2014). A step at a time, in the long term, these steps will become part of one’s own CPD based on one’s own choices. ELT professionals will be able to find their own way and share their knowledge and interests with other colleagues who are interested in the same issues and areas of interest.

REFLECTIVE TASK 6:

- Which stage of your reflective journey are you at?
- What is your next step?
- What do you see yourself doing in a year’s time?

CONCLUSION

Taking ownership of one’s own CPD is key to an ELT professional’s successful career but this necessitates engaging in some type of reflection. Reflective practice, in particular engaging in reflective writing, is not without its own challenges and teachers often have many concerns. However, if teachers take one step at a time and find appropriate support and guidance from tutors or mentors, the reflective process will be rewarding.

carecampbell@gmail.com
REFERENCES


A research-based approach to teaching prewriting strategies in academic writing

Mario Aquilina
Centre for English Language Proficiency, University of Malta, Malta

This paper presents an instructional method for prewriting strategies in academic writing classes. The instructional practices proposed have been tested in a variety of academic writing contexts, and they are based on theoretical and research insights from both genre-based and process approaches to writing. The paper refers to and builds on existent research in the field to first investigate the relevance of prewriting strategies in academic writing and then suggest practical ways in which these may be implemented in a writing class context.
WHY TEACH PREWRITING STRATEGIES?

Academic writing requires students to write texts that are determined by what may be described as specific rhetorical situations. In many class, home and examination contexts related to academic writing, students have to respond to pre-established rubrics, which necessitate writing in specific genres, and to address their writing to an intended audience. In such contexts, several crucial aspects of writing, including content, style, tone and pitch, are regulated by the requirement for qualities like clarity, relevance, coherence, accuracy and appropriateness. These expectations, which are generally inimical to impulsive and spontaneous approaches to writing, strengthen the case for students being taught prewriting strategies that enhance their awareness of and control over the overarching rhetorical situation.

Research into the effectiveness of prewriting techniques has consistently shown that specific forms of prewriting treatments tend to have varying degrees of largely positive effects on the quality of the writing of students at different levels (Graham & Perin, 2007; Brodney, Reeves, & Kazelskis, 1999; Reece & Cumming, 1996). For instance, Graham and Perin’s (2007) extensive meta-analysis leads to several recommendations for the adolescent writing class context. Defining writing quality “in terms of coherently organized essays containing well developed and pertinent ideas, supporting examples, and appropriate detail,” (p. 14), Graham and Perin (2007) highlight, among others, the effectiveness of prewriting, “which engages students in activities designed to help them generate or organize ideas for their composition” and of writing strategies, “which involves teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions” (p. 4). What is more contentious is not the relevance of prewriting in the writing class but the kind of prewriting strategy that may be most effective.

Emphasis on prewriting tends to be associated with process writing approaches (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Brodney et al., 1999; Graham & Sandmel, 2011; Morris, 2012). Prewriting strategies are seen as playing a crucial part in the writing process primarily because they provide writers with the opportunity to plan their work in various levels of detail before they move on to other phases in the writing process, including translating and revising (Graham & Perin, 2007). In this context, prewriting may take the form of brainstorming, clustering and concept mapping, through which writers generate ideas for writing and reflect on the best ways of presenting those ideas within the rhetorical circumstances provoked by the assigned rubric.

However, prewriting strategies are not exclusive to process approaches, and they also play a key role in genre-based methodologies, which are often proposed as alternatives to process writing (Hyland, 2007). Rather than focusing primarily on the cycle of writing, genre-based approaches foster an understanding of text as a specific type of communicative event serving a specific function and recognised by a relevant community. Texts are analysed for typical ‘moves’ within
the genre, some of which are obligatory and some optional (Swales, 1990; Henry & Roseberry, 1998). While genre analysis is characterised by a central focus on the text in context, different pedagogical routes may be employed (Wingate, 2012, p. 28). One key variation relates to whether the text analysis is carried out by the teacher-researcher who identifies moves in a wide range of texts in a specific genre, which are then taught to students in the academic writing class, or whether the text analysis is carried out, jointly, by instructors and learners within the modelling phase of the writing class (Wingate, 2012, p. 28). Within the method being proposed in this paper, the latter option is seen as preferable because it encourages learners to participate in the analytical phase of the process hence urging them to tap into higher order cognitive skills such as critical awareness that the method, as a whole, aims to foster.

Through exposure to model texts in the genre being studied, the method proposed guides students towards identifying key textual moves in a specific genre, their arrangement in texts, and related linguistic features. In particular, the focus is on recognising the typical rhetorical organisation of texts in a genre, which, as a study by Henry and Roseberry (1998) shows, allows students “to concentrate [during the writing stage] on combining the elements effectively in terms of both achieving their communicative goals and producing more highly textured writing” (p. 154). Genre analysis helps to foster the understanding that academic writing places writers within a pre-established rhetorical tradition characterized by specific norms and conventions. One key difference between this kind of prewriting, which is used in genre-based literacy pedagogy, and those associated with process approaches, such as brainstorming and concept mapping, is that it cannot be used in most examination contexts. However, both have a key role to play in the academic writing classroom environment and in pedagogies that value independent and active learning.

RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF METHOD PROPOSED

The prewriting treatments being suggested involve a combination of genre-based and process approach strategies. The motivation behind the method proposed here is to utilise the strengths of the different approaches while mitigating their potential weaknesses. More specifically, from process writing, I emphasise the activation of the students’ higher-order thinking skills that brainstorming and concept mapping can provide (Bloom et al., 1956; Morris, 2012). Through these prewriting routines, students are encouraged to show “active engagement with ideas” in the context of specific rhetorical situations rather than simply working within pre-established prescriptive constraints (Morris, 2012, p. 85). Students are encouraged to not only think of relevant points, while distinguishing between superordinate and subordinate ideas, but also about the connections between
These points. This concept-based thinking encourages students to “shape their material according to its nature and their aims” (Robinson, 1994, p. 194).

One key benefit of focusing on prewriting strategies in the academic writing class is that, as Morris argues, “quality prewriting helps motivate students by increasing their expertise and by spreading the cognitive load of composing, freeing mental resources for the actual writing” (Morris, 2012, p. 85). Having thought about which points will be developed and in which order before writing begins allows writers to focus more on language accuracy and expression during the writing itself.

A further consideration underpinning the method is the emphasis on strategy instruction that allows students to learn higher order skills that are transferable to different writing contexts. More specifically, the use of what Richards et al. (1992) describe as a combination approach to strategy instruction, in which strategies are introduced both explicitly and in ways which are embedded in the actual content of the subject (p. 355), allows students to acquire thinking, planning and writing skills that are essential not only in academic writing but also a variety of other genres (Flower & Hayes, 1980, p. 40). As Al-Shaer (2014) puts it, strategy instruction “transfonms students into active learners by training them on how to learn and how to employ what they have learned in their daily life... [S]tudents learn to integrate new information with previous background, in a way that makes sense, facilitating information or skill retrieval at any time or place” (p. 3).

From genre-analysis, I retain the exposure to exemplary texts from specific genres. Reading a carefully selected sample of texts written in the genre that writers are learning compensates for the lack of awareness of language and genre constraints that an exclusively process-oriented approach to writing would create (Hyland, 2007). The method proposed also embraces the argument that the writing process cannot be conceived in a vacuum and that it is inextricable, both cognitively and pedagogically, from reading. Research by Brodney et al. (1999), which compared the effect of various combinations of prewriting and reading treatments on expository compositions written by fifth grade students, found that a combination of reading and prewriting before composing was “the most effective prewriting instructional strategy” (p. 5). Summarising the issue, Grabe (2001) argues that “One of the most consistent implications of two decades of reading and writing relations is that they should be taught together and that the combination of both literacy skills enhances learning in all areas” (p. 25). Brodney et al.’s (1999) review of relevant literature makes similar claims for the combination of reading and writing instruction. The authors justify the rationale for this combination by highlighting the way both reading and writing involve construction of meaning through the same cognitive schemata. During composition, writers anticipate the metacognitive processes involved in reading, and an understanding of text organisation and paragraph construction is crucial both in writing and in reading.
METHOD

The prewriting method proposed here may be schematised as consisting of five stages, beginning with genre analysis and continuing with four prewriting cycles characterised by descending degrees of teacher input and ascending degrees of independent learning. The model (shown in Figure 1) allows for flexibility as the writing instructors may opt to repeat or omit any of the prewriting cycles depending on their judgment of the cognitive abilities of the learners as well as their familiarity with the genre being taught and with the prewriting strategies employed. The rationale behind the combination of genre analysis, as a first stage, and successive prewriting stages is based on the assumption that the prewriting strategies employed—primarily, brainstorming and concept mapping—are more likely to be effective when the writers are familiar with the linguistic and rhetorical conventions of the genre in which they are writing. The proposed order of the prewriting stages, on the other hand, allows the classroom sessions to move, gradually, through the following combinations of teacher input and active learning: modelling and explicit instruction by the teacher; collaboration in the form of peer to peer and peer to teacher interaction; and relatively independent writing practice. The stages are designed to not only guide students into learning how to write in a specific genre but also to stimulate their higher order thinking skills and to equip them with thinking and writing strategies that can then be employed in contexts beyond the genre they are learning. One benefit of this focus on writing strategies means that in successive uses of the method for the teaching of different genres to the same students, less time will need to be spent on fostering the meta-awareness of the students about the processes of brainstorming and concept mapping as they will have already been exposed to this aspect of prewriting in previous cycles.
STAGE DESCRIPTIONS

This section of the paper offers suggestions on how the method being proposed can be applied, in practice, within the academic writing classroom context. The proposed teaching strategy is to combine prewriting exercises favoured in genre analysis with cyclical stages that are usually associated with process writing approaches. As it will become clear in what follows, the various cycles are designed to enhance students’ higher order cognitive skills, thus allowing the specific training in a particular writing genre to also strengthen their writing in other genres. However, the cycles also allow for students to be exposed to appropriate models of writing in specific text-types, thus building on the philosophy of familiarity with convention that is central to genre approaches.

Genre analysis
During this stage, students are exposed to a range of texts in the genre that they are learning. Teachers may employ a variety of methods to make the students aware of the linguistic devices and the rhetorical moves that are typical of a specific genre. They may use their expertise in a genre, acquired, for instance, through analysis of relevant corpora, to highlight the generic constraints directly. They may also guide the students by asking specific questions and assigning specific exercises aimed at eliciting generic characteristics from the learners.

For instance, in teaching academic writing, teachers may ask students to identify the transitional phrases and the topic sentences in some paragraphs or the whole text. They may then focus on a particular paragraph and elicit the different functions of sentences within a paragraph, such as exemplification, clarification, elaboration, referencing, quoting and linking. The aim of these exercises is to expose students to the linguistic, rhetorical and generic constraints they will need to be aware of when writing in the specific genre at a later stage.

Cycle 1
Brainstorming and concept mapping are the two key prewriting strategies in academic writing. The first cycle after the genre analysis allows the writing instructor to introduce both of these strategies by highlighting their importance to students and offering a practical demonstration of how they may be employed in academic writing. In this cycle, the instructor provides a significant level of input by eliciting and participating in both the brainstorming and concept mapping phases. At this stage, learners are immersed in “borrowed consciousness,” that is, “the idea that learners working with knowledgeable others develop greater understanding of tasks and ideas” (Hyland, 2007, p. 158). In this cycle, the instructor acts as a model for the learners, while the students actively learn by participating in the prewriting exercises as a class activity.

At this stage, the instructor may focus on highlighting thinking strategies
that the students may employ to facilitate their prewriting exercises when they are working on their own. While brainstorming is often thought of as a random association exercise, students may be shown the usefulness of thinking triggers that could improve their brainstorming skills in different writing genres. For instance, students may be shown the effect of looking at the specific topic they are writing about through journalist questions—what, who, where, when, how and why—or through a series of other relevant prompt words, like ‘context,’ ‘history,’ ‘theory,’ ‘for’ and ‘against,’ which may facilitate and guide their brainstorming. These prompts may also be adapted to the specific academic writing genre being taught.

In the concept mapping stage, the instructor may focus on distinguishing between superordinate and subordinate concepts that will have arisen in the brainstorming phase. The class discussion may also be focused on eliciting different opinions about the ways in which the concepts may be organised in the writing. This encourages the students to develop meta-awareness about the prewriting strategies they are practising.

**Cycle 2**
The cycles following the genre analysis phase and Cycle 1 are meant to gradually shift the cognitive workload from the writing instructor to the learner, thus encouraging the latter to take a gradually increasing responsibility in the prewriting exercises conducted in class. In this cycle of teacher-supported learning, the brainstorming is done by the students, in groups of three to five, and is then followed by a teacher-led class discussion of the possible concept maps that may be derived from the students’ brainstorming. Once again, in this part of the prewriting, the teacher can contribute to the shaping of the concept map. Through the group work, the students have access to “shared consciousness,” that is, “the idea that learners working together learn more effectively than individuals working separately” (Hyland, 2007, p. 158).

**Cycle 3**
The aims in this cycle are to, on the one hand, give further opportunities to students to practise prewriting strategies and, on the other hand, develop the higher order skill of meta-cognitive awareness. In this cycle, the brainstorming is done by the students working individually, while the concept mapping is done collaboratively by the students in groups of three to five. During this part of the session, the instructor can roam around the space of the classroom in order to offer feedback and assistance where necessary. After the groups have formulated their concept map, the structure of the lesson changes to a class discussion in which the various concept maps are explained by group representatives and the teacher gives feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the various possibilities proposed by the students.
Cycle 4
In the final cycle, students work individually throughout the various stages of prewriting, that is, through brainstorming and concept mapping. The instructor may opt to ask some of the students to share their final plans in a class discussion or may give individual feedback while roaming around the class.

CONCLUSION

The method proposed here has been developed and utilised over ten years of teaching within the context of academic writing classes at both pre-university and university levels. While evidence of the method’s beneficial effects on students’ writing exists in the form of student feedback and teacher evaluation, more scientifically verifiable evidence of its positive impact on writing quality should be sought. A potential limitation of this method, also to be verified by research, is the time needed for its implementation. Given its cyclical structure, which is inspired by process approaches to writing, the use of the method for the teaching of a specific writing genre needs to be spread over a number of lessons. Whether an exclusively genre-based approach may lead to better results within the short (or indeed the long) term is a research question worth investigating.

mario.aquilina@um.edu.mt
REFERENCES


Feedback practices and strategies: perceptions and challenges

Stephanie Xerri Agius
University of Malta, Malta

This paper explores feedback practices and strategies, as well as the challenges of feedback implementation. Drawing from research conducted in an ESL context and referring to seminal research in the area of feedback, the paper investigates learners’ perceptions of feedback and suggests some procedures for providing and implementing feedback. The principles of feedback practice and strategies of feedback implementation were trialled in a variety of international contexts, and they can be adapted to a range of instructional situations. Ultimately, this paper underlines that feedback is not only important to highlight learners’ errors but it is also instrumental in enabling learners to become more responsible for their writing.
INTRODUCTION

This paper explores feedback practices in an ESL context, learners’ perception of feedback, the concept of ‘usability’, and feedback application. Challenges of feedback application and suggestions to overcome them are also considered, with the aim of encouraging learners to use the feedback for future writing practice. The study was conducted at a post-secondary school in Malta and it involved semi-structured interviews with students and teachers. Following the transcription of the interviews, patterns were analysed using grounded theory, which meant that the perceptions and challenges of feedback emerged from the data. The study established definitions of feedback, highlighted the language of feedback (and comments), explored learners’ feedback preferences, and considered feedback implementation. All of these foci are discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections.

DEFINING FEEDBACK

The starting point was an attempt to interpret what feedback signifies to the learner. From a conceptual viewpoint, feedback can be defined as specific information provided by tutors to the students about the performance of a task, so one of the aims of feedback would be to enhance future performance (Ur, 1996). Moreover, feedback is “a key element of the scaffolding provided by the teacher to build learner confidence and the literacy resources to participate in target communities” (Hyland & Hyland, 2006, p. 83). So teacher feedback can not only enable learners to understand how well they have performed, but it also motivates them to be part of a supportive classroom environment (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). Other researchers (Leki, 1991; Ferris & Roberts, 2001) contend that students find feedback most useful when it leads to effective changes and improvement in writing.

The benefits of feedback extend to the motivational and cognitive level (Brookhart, 2008). At the cognitive level, feedback gives students the information they need so they can understand their progress in their learning journey and what to do next. At the motivational level, once students feel they understand what to do and why, most of them go on to develop control over their own learning. These two factors are part of the scaffolding that feedback entails.
TABLE 1: DEFINING FEEDBACK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of feedback</th>
<th>Learners’ comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(based on student interviews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The importance of feedback</td>
<td>Having feedback helps you to write a more structured and more detailed essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefit of feedback (motivational level)</td>
<td>To have detailed comments makes me want to try harder to write a good essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefit of feedback (cognitive level)</td>
<td>It allows you to see what you did and you can evaluate your work not just have someone else do it for you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback as scaffolding for future writing</td>
<td>When feedback comments point you in the right direction I keep the essay and refer back to it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gradations of feedback commentary
Feedback practice focuses on targets of achievement in relation to the writing task in question. Analysis of text types and learners’ essays have yielded categorisations of feedback, which are also linked to the role that feedback plays in directing the learner towards future writing practice. The example of six types of feedback (or comments) is one of the categorisation systems. The key concept is that these gradations of feedback offer flexibility as they can be adapted according to the context and learners’ needs. Practitioners can either utilise or reflect on their own practice and compare the gradations with what they currently do. The following activity suggests how to utilise the example.

Activity 1
The teacher assigns learners a writing task (it could be a 100-word paragraph or a 250-word essay on any topic or area). Whilst responding to the text, the teacher writes comments according to Walker’s (2009) adaptation of Brown and Glover’s feedback system (2006):

1. Content – that is, comments that relate to the substance of the answer, to the appropriateness of what the student has chosen to include, to the quality and/or accuracy of the material, to omissions;
2. Skills development – that is, comments about the structure of the answer (whether it is a text or diagram), about whether the question has been properly addressed, about the student’s communication skills;
3. Motivating – that is, praise, encouragement and other comments designed to motivate the student;
4. De-motivating – that is, using harsh language, judgmental;
5. A mention of future study;
6. A reference to a resource the student could use. (p. 68)

Alternatively, the teacher may want to look back at previously marked essays and reflect on how the comments were written and what the focus of feedback was initially. Another suggestion would be to mark the essays as one would usually do and ask a colleague to do the same; the two teachers would then swap the essays and compare them against the criteria above. This would enable objectivity and serve as reflective practice.

The language of feedback is as important and effective as the content. Feedback commentary can be worded as praise, criticism and advice (Hyland, 2001). In praising learners’ writing, the positive features of writing are emphasised and this can be conveyed either through in-depth written feedback or by means of verbal feedback. This is one way of boosting motivation in learners’ attitude to writing. On the other hand, criticism focuses on the omissions or lapses in writing; however, this can be perceived as negative, so it is suggested that teachers adopt a constructive approach whereby the criticism aims to locate issues in writing so as to raise more awareness of errors (Silver & Lee, 2007). Ferris (1997) recommends that “teachers should not abandon constructive criticism but should place it side-by-side with comments of encouragement” (p. 49). This involves striking a balance between the two extremes, which entails wording the feedback as advice that “might include an element of criticism but is seen as being more extended and perhaps as less explicitly critical” (Silver & Lee, 2007, p. 7). In using advice as feedback, the teacher is perceived as “a mentor or a facilitator rather than a critic or an evaluator” (Silver & Lee, 2007, p. 16). At different stages of providing feedback, it is recommended that teachers are more conscious and reflective of the language that frames their recommendations; the next section explores the metalanguage of feedback more specifically.

THE LANGUAGE OF TEACHER FEEDBACK: LEARNERS’ PERCEPTIONS

One of the concerns of teachers and learners alike is the extent to which feedback is understood and ultimately applied by the latter. The evidence in writing samples very often indicates that there is a gap between the feedback provided and its application. The question is whether this gap is due to the content, or whether the language that frames the feedback is adequately understood by the learners and can be utilised for future writing. For this reason, the key concepts of “usability” and “feeding forward” are central to research on feedback; the first refers to comments that learners can understand, interpret and adopt in future assignments so as to “address their misconceptions” and “improve their work”
Feedback that is meant to “feed forward” (Walker, 2009) is a set of comments and recommendations that learners can apply to future learning. The feedback provided can also be either retrospective or future-altering (Walker, 2009) and the language used reflects one of the two; when teachers provide feedback, they would need to decide whether their comments are meant to reflect on the writing produced or if their recommendations involve a set of steps to follow to improve the quality of writing. On the one hand, retrospective feedback addresses a gap manifested in the work that has been assessed; on the other, future-altering feedback aims to alter or ‘close’ the gaps in upcoming writing activities. The second type of feedback is considered more useful because students can look beyond the assignment towards future work (Walker, 2009). So the feedback is looking ‘forward’ rather than looking ‘back’, which means that the comments are to be actively transferred to future writing tasks. However, to be usable by the learners, the teacher’s comments must do more than simply point a gap out; they must be designed to help the learner to reduce or close the gap. The point is to discover and analyse the type of feedback or comments that targets closing the gap between feedback provision and application.

Table 2: Learners’ Perceptions of Feedback

- It’s one thing just giving a mark and writing ‘it could be better’ and it’s another saying ‘you could use more descriptive terms such as…’ – it’s feedback that actually leads you somewhere
- I can remember what the teacher said by looking at the comments and then I prepare to write the next essay
- Giving detailed correction so as to explain what should have been done instead
- It has helped me not to repeat certain mistakes sometimes and also learn from others, for example, when the teacher reads a better essay I write certain words and try to use them next time

Teacher feedback practices and student feedback implementation were investigated in line with the recommendations and principles of good feedback practice (Gibbs & Simpson, 2005; Brown & Glover, 2006; Gould & Day, 2012).

Activity 2

The seven principles of good feedback practice could help to refine the way in which teachers write their feedback comments. This activity suggests rewording one’s feedback or creating feedback comments that satisfy the following criteria embedded within the theoretical principles (Nicol & Milligan, 2005; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).
TABLE 3: SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF GOOD FEEDBACK

1. helps clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, expected standards)
2. facilitates the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning
3. delivers high quality information to students about their learning
4. encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning
5. encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem
6. provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance
7. provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape the teaching

Additionally, the teacher can reflect on whether the language of feedback succeeds in being:

- true and relevant (to assessment);
- feasible and realistic to implement;
- associated with methods, preferably tried and proven, to implement the principle.

Learners’ feedback preferences
Most learners prefer positive feedback and constructive criticism rather than comments that only emphasize the more problematic features of their writing (Reed & Burton, 1985; Sträub, 1997; Daiker, 1999). Others prefer constructive criticism as they believe it encourages them to strive harder (Radecki & Swales, 1988; Enginarlar, 1993). Alternating between constructive criticism and praise can be extremely helpful and motivating for students (Burkland & Grimm, 1984). Later studies revealed that students prefer teacher written feedback to alternative forms such as oral and peer feedback (Saito, 1994; Zhang, 1995). Feedback on content and expression of ideas is as important as grammatical feedback. Students are eager to receive feedback on what Sträub (1997) defines as global issues (related to organization, purpose and content), as well as on local issues (related to grammar, sentence construction and choice of vocabulary).

TABLE 4: LEARNERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF ORAL VS. WRITTEN FEEDBACK

- I prefer oral feedback because even though sometimes it can be a little bit intimidating you try to remember next time so the teacher won’t repeat the same things in front of your friends
- If a student is paying attention then for me oral feedback is more immediate and personalized; but then written feedback is easier to refer to at home
- Normally, I prefer one-to-one feedback. OK, it’s good that you have comments on an essay at the end but normally when the lesson ends I go and ask ‘What is this comment? I don’t understand how I could do better?’
FEEDBACK IMPLEMENTATION: CHALLENGES AND SUGGESTIONS

The first type of learner adapts teacher feedback but tends to be more independent-minded and creative, willing to experiment with language, and considered to be more confident in writing (Ferris, 1997). The second type of learner feels more encumbered by mistakes and will depend heavily on teacher feedback as a yardstick for revision. The latter is generally perceived as the less proficient learner (Hyland, 1998). Moreover, the process of being provided with feedback for assessment purposes can be perceived as daunting by learners for whom the teacher is merely an evaluator and assessor of their work (Ziv, 1984). Those learners who have low self-esteem may not find teacher feedback useful as they associate it with poor proficiency in writing (Cohen, 1987). Feedback that is far too critical or harsh could affect and even undermine their willingness and confidence to write. Additionally, feedback that is either too focused on ‘correcting mistakes’ and not goal-oriented enough to achieve certain objectives is not perceived as very relevant for future writing tasks.

### TABLE 5: LEARNERS’ EXPERIENCES OF FEEDBACK IMPLEMENTATION

- I used to get the same mark so I didn’t bother with the feedback very much
- Often the feedback is only at the end of the essay so it’s not clearly connected to the parts of the essay
- What confuses me the most is when feedback is written in point form and it’s short and not in detail
- I think it would be hard if the feedback is not written and the paper is not next to me, if the feedback does not say where I did wrong or what I did wrong

An analysis of the learners’ comments, perceptions and experiences was conducted against the criteria of providing feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Walker, 2009). The concept diagram below presents some initial suggestions as points of reflection on how to overcome the above challenges to the implementation of feedback:

### FIGURE 1: POINTS OF REFLECTION ON FEEDBACK IMPLEMENTATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of the teacher</th>
<th>Language of feedback</th>
<th>Feedback foci</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boost learners’ self-esteem - focus on strengths of writing</td>
<td>Awareness of language and tone used when providing feedback</td>
<td>Establish clear foci of feedback and doable targets to achieve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide scaffolding for the learner - feedback is iterative</td>
<td>Inclusion of comments of encouragement</td>
<td>Reconcile the gaps between oral and written feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSION

The process of providing feedback involves imparting cognitive and analytical mechanisms that enable the learners to assess their own progress and apply a critically reflective approach to academic work and professional practice. Learners need to develop their critical appraisal skills and gain an appreciation of how teachers make qualitative judgments about their work (Sadler, 2010). Learner autonomy relates to the ability to work independently towards identified goals (Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006). Finally, the aim of feedback is not only to ‘fix’ errors in writing but also to encourage students to learn how to self-monitor their thinking, learning and performance (Pintrich & Zusho, 2002). It is an iterative process whereby students are not only guided as to how to write but also as to how to become more self-aware and consequently more responsible for their writing.

stephanie.xerri-agius@um.edu.mt
REFERENCES


Several disregarded teaching techniques, once shorn of the ‘discredited’ methodological principles underpinning them, can in fact be reinstated and used to great practical effect in the classroom. In some cases they can even be reinserted into more ‘enlightened’ approaches. Grammar-Translation is examined first and translation is re-presented as a means of consciousness-raising by helping learners to explicitly compare their own language(s) with English. Audiolingualism’s stimulus-response pattern drills are repackaged as a means of introducing ‘playfulness’ and notching up the level of challenge, two elements that feature in Scrivener and Underhill’s Demand-High Teaching. Teacher Talking Time in Communicative Language Teaching is re-examined in the light of the importance in the acquisition process given by Krashen to teacher talk as a vital source of comprehensible input for learners. Finally, the PPP model for grammar instruction within Communicative Language Teaching is redesigned with a new, non-accuracy stage replacing the final P for Production stage.
INTRODUCTION

The last hundred years have seen methodologies come, methodologies go. As each exciting new approach asserts itself, ELT frequently pulls the plug on the previous approach – and often, down the plughole disappear the approach, the methodology and all the associated teaching techniques: the baby gets thrown out with the bathwater. However, several disregarded teaching techniques, once shorn of the ‘discredited’ methodological principles underpinning them, can in fact be reinstated and used to great practical effect in the classroom. In some cases they can even be reinserted into more ‘enlightened’ approaches.

GRAMMAR TRANSLATION

Features

In a Grammar-Translation approach, learners often learn grammatical rules and apply them to sentences and texts to translate, from the native language (L1) to the target language (L2) and vice-versa. Vocabulary is taught in long lists, with words in L1 and corresponding L2 columns (and vice-versa). Typical examples used to practise the genitive/possessive might include:

The jaw of the jackass lies in the corner of the field.
La plume de ma tante.

Although Grammar-Translation was in vogue early in the last century, and was mainly used for the study of Greek and Latin, many learners in the UK and here in Malta recall being taught French via Grammar-Translation in the late 1960s. Indeed, although no longer in fashion in north-western Europe and the USA and other countries influenced by Anglo-Saxon cultures, it is still probably largely in use in the vast majority of schoolrooms around the world.

Disadvantages of Grammar Translation

- The language focussed on tends to be translations of literary language or made up to exemplify grammatical points and does not really cater for the practical, communicative needs of learners.
- The strong focus on memorisation of grammar rules and word lists does not motivate learners to communicate in L2: any interaction in the classroom tends to be in L1.
- There is an almost exclusive focus on reading and writing: little attention is paid to speaking and listening.
- Some words/expressions/tenses/concepts do not have a direct translation.
- A G-T (Grammar-Translation) approach often encourages a word-for-word approach to translation.
• A G-T approach is only possible in monolingual classes.
• A G-T teacher needs to be competent/proficient in both L1 and L2.
• An over-emphasis on translation means the learner cannot become emancipated from dependence on L1.
• In a G-T approach, lessons tend to be very teacher-fronted.

USING TRANSLATION TODAY

Before moving on to seeing what can be salvaged from Grammar-Translation and used in the modern classroom, let us look briefly at two concepts that have become established in recent times.

Interlanguage and noticing the gap
The term ‘interlanguage’, first coined by Selinker (1972), refers to a non-native speaker’s use of the foreign language in its current state of development. It is an evolving system of rules and it is influenced by many factors and processes, including what the learner already knows and can use in the target language, hypotheses about L2 influenced by L1, and generalisations and contrasts of rules and patterns influenced by other examples in L2.

Many language teachers nowadays believe that it is highly beneficial for learners (particularly adult learners) to help them to ‘notice’ features of L2 that they may not have previously registered because “adults do seem to have lost the still mysterious ability of children to acquire the grammatical forms of language while apparently not paying attention to them” (Schmidt, 1983, p. 172) and to ‘notice the gap’ between their own interlanguage and what a native or proficient speaker might say or write. Much of this work is derived from Schmidt’s seminal case studies of two learners (Schmidt, 1983; Schmidt & Frota, 1986) from which his Noticing Hypothesis was formulated:

The Noticing Hypothesis — an hypothesis that input does not become intake for language learning unless it is noticed, that is, consciously registered (Schmidt, 1990, 2001) — has been around now for about two decades and continues to generate experimental studies, suggestions for L2 pedagogy, conference papers and controversy. […] In the simplest terms, people learn about the things that they pay attention to and do not learn much about the things they do not attend to. (Schmidt, 2010, p. 721)

Schmidt (2010) also posits that often it is not enough to be corrected. Some stronger, more explicit form of noticing is required:
In addition, [Frota and I] found that although I was frequently corrected for my grammatical errors in conversation with native speakers, in many cases this had no effect because I was unaware that I was being corrected. This suggested a slightly different hypothesis that we called “noticing the gap,” the idea that in order to overcome errors, learners must make conscious comparisons between their own output and target language input. (p. 724)

So how can we get learners to ‘notice the gap’ between their own interlanguage and proficient L1 use? One effective way of creating what we can call ‘Ah moments’ is by providing opportunities for learners to consciously contrast L1 and L2 through C-R activities: consciousness-raising activities. Translation provides a means of doing so.

‘Noticing the gap’ – translation technique 1: L2 to L1
Learners focus on a language structure using whatever approach the teacher deems appropriate. When this has been done, the teacher writes on the board an example of the language point and learners are asked to come up to the board and to write a translation into their own language. They then answer the following questions (and explain to the class):

- Is it the same, more or less, in your language? Do the same kinds of things happen?
- Is it different? If so, in what way(s)?

For example, in the following two sentences contrasting the present perfect simple with the past simple

1. a. I've been to Spain  
   b. I went to Spain last year

the verb phrases can be expressed using the same verb phrase in Maltese (mort) and in many other languages.

Other example contrasts in English are offered which could be subjected to the same technique. These include:

1. a. She works in London.  
   b. She’s working in Spain this month.
2. a. I’ll help you if I can.  
   b. I’d help you if I could.
3. a. Have you been to Spain?  
   b. When did you go?
4. a. I’m here for a month.  
   b. I’ve been here for a month.
5. a. I’ve been here for a month.  
   b. I’ve been here since September.
6. a. He’s reading a book.  
   b. He bought the book in London.

Helping learners to become explicitly aware of such similarities and differences between L1 and L2 probably increases memorability: the gap is noticed and registered.
‘Noticing the gap’ – translation technique 2: L2 to L1

The procedure for this technique is as follows:

1. Take an item of language you intend to teach.
2. Insert it into a short text/dialogue.
3. Translate it into the learners’ language(s).
4. Ask learners to write out a translation into English (their interlanguage).
5. Ask learners to compare their translation with your original English text.
   Ask:
   • Is anything strange, or unfamiliar, to you?
   • Is there anything you would like to ask about?

For example, the following dialogue in learners’ L1 can be offered for learners to translate into English.

**FRENCH**

A Mario est toujours en retard!
B Si (seulement) il pouvait arriver à l’heure, juste une fois!
A Quel est son numéro?
B Si je le savais!

**GERMAN**

A Mario kommt immer zu spät!
B Ich wünschte, er wäre pünktlich, nur ein einziges Mal!
A Welche Nummer hat er?
B Ich wünschte ich wüsste es!

**SPANISH**

A Mario siempre llega tarde.
B ¡Quisiera que llegara a tiempo sólo por una vez!
A ¿Cuál es su número?
B ¡Ojalá lo supiera!

**ITALIAN**

A Mario è /arriva sempre in ritardo.
B Vorrei che arrivasse in orario per una volta!
A Qual’ è il suo numero.
B Magari lo sapessi!

**MALTESE**

A Mario dejjem tard!
B Nixtieq li jiġi / jasal fil-hin, imqar ghal-darba.
A X’inhu n-numru tieghu?
B Nixtieq li kont naf!
Learners work on a translation into L2. Finally, the ‘teacher’s translation’ (containing the target language) is provided:

A Mario’s always late!  
B I wish he’d arrive on time, just for once!  
A What’s his number?  
B I wish I knew!

At this point, participants are reminded of the two questions in e. above.

THE DIRECT METHOD

The Direct Method in English Language Teaching was developed as a response to the Grammar-Translation method in the late nineteenth century and became popular in the early years of the twentieth century. Its basic premise was that second language learning should occur in the same way as first language learning, that is, through direct exposure and not mediated by translation. In the Direct Method, all teaching is done in the target language, grammar is taught inductively i.e. by seeing examples and patterns but with no grammatical explanations. Speaking and listening are prioritised and only useful ‘everyday’ language is taught. The main weaknesses in the Direct Method are first of all its assumption that a second language can be learnt in exactly the same way as a first, when in fact the conditions under which a second language is learnt are very different, e.g. the amount of exposure and the fact that a learner already has an L1 when learning an L2. Secondly, with no explicit grammar knowledge learners may find it difficult to self-correct and to form more complex utterances. However, the insistence on ‘English only’, the positioning of speaking and listening as priorities and the insistence on non-literary language are legacies which are still with us today.

AUDIOLINGUALISM

The Direct Method paved the way for the Audiolingual Method (ALM), which became popular in the 1950s and 60s and which still provides one of the main methodological underpinnings of several international language teaching brands today. It was based on structural linguistics, i.e. a way of viewing the phonological (sounds), morphological (to do with the internal structures of words) and syntactical (to do with the ways in which words are put together in sentences) systems of a language as the building blocks of a language. This was different from the traditional categories of Latin grammar. ALM was also heavily influenced by behaviourism in psychology and saw all language learning as habit formation.
Features
- There is no explicit grammar instruction – forms and patterns are memorised.
- The teaching of speaking and listening are emphasised before reading and writing.
- Learners’ L1 (mother tongue) is discouraged in the classroom.
- Dialogues are memorised and used to present new language.
- The focus is on learning grammar – through pattern drills (stimulus and response) used as the main forms of practice. These usually take the form of repetition, substitution or transformation drills.

Here is an example of a possible stimulus-response transformation pattern drill:

**Voice/Teacher:** It was a great film, wasn’t it?
**Student transformation:** Yes, the best I’ve ever seen.
**Voice/Teacher repeats so student can get immediate feedback:**
Yes, the best I’ve ever seen.

_The exercise continues (T = Teacher; S = Students):_

T: It was a great meal, wasn’t it?     S: Yes, the best I’ve ever had.
T: She’s a great singer, isn’t she?    S: Yes, the best I’ve ever heard.
T: It’s a great wine, isn’t it?       S: Yes, the best I’ve ever tasted.
T: It’s a great country, isn’t it?   S: Yes, the best I’ve ever been to.

Disadvantages of the Audiolingual Method
- The theoretical basis proved to be weak: behaviourist theory held that language learning consisted of imitated behaviour; whereas we now believe that humans learn language from underlying implicit knowledge of abstract rules.
- Pattern practice, memorisation and drilling lead to language-like behaviour, but not to communicative competence in the real world.
- Endless pattern drilling leads to boredom and disengagement by all but the most committed, motivated learners.
- Learners play a reactive role by responding to stimuli; they are not allowed to initiate interaction as this may lead to mistakes (and therefore to the formation of ‘bad habits’); they have no control over the content of the lesson, or the learning style or pace of learning.
- The teacher dominates the class: they model the target language, control the direction and pace of learning and monitor and correct learners’ performance.
USING PATTERN DRILLING TODAY

‘Deeper learning’ within Communicative Language Teaching
Over the past three or four years, Scrivener and Underhill (2012) have been making a case for what they label as ‘Demand-High Teaching’. In their eponymous blog they ask:

- Are our learners capable of more, much more?
- Have the tasks and techniques we use in class become rituals and ends in themselves?
- How can we stop “covering material” and start focusing on the potential for deep learning?
- What small tweaks and adjustments can we make to shift the whole focus of our teaching towards getting that engine of learning going? (Scrivener & Underhill, 2012)

In a reflective mode, the present author shares his frustration at what he perceives as an increasing avoidance of a focus on oral accuracy in classrooms where the Communicative Language Teaching label is sometimes used as some form of justification for avoiding the upgrading of accuracy:

...in so many classes an emphasis is put on ‘communication’. Great, and I’m right up there on the front line, waving my ‘Communicate!’ banner. So communicative tasks and task-based learning feature prominently in my classes. But just occasionally I get the feeling that ‘Communicate’ is used as a kind of opt-out: an opt-out of an accuracy focus, an opt-out of any attempt to consciously upgrade learners’ English. It’s almost as if we think, as long as they communicate, their English will upgrade automatically, won’t it? Hmm, not so sure about this argument. Does Andy Murray get better at tennis only by playing? Or does he get specific coaching? And does he practise particular shots and moves, repeatedly, in order to improve?

So communication and fluency by all means, but let’s give grammar (and pronunciation and vocabulary and functions and discourse features) a conscious focus. Let’s have lots of examples and lots of practice. And let’s make this practice really useful practice. (Marsh, 2014)

One of the techniques proposed by Scrivener and Underhill to encourage learners to focus on improved oral accuracy (with particular regard to phonological features) is to repeat an utterance or exercise ‘playfully’ (Scrivener, 2014). This suggestion can be applied, for example, to the pattern drill demonstrated
above. The drill is repeated, but this time learners can be asked to respond by exaggerating pitch and intonation range in order to express wild enthusiasm with their superlative adjectives. In this way, language is upgraded and learning is deepened: learners combine a focus on grammatical accuracy with a focus on phonological features.

Many modern course book exercises can be transformed into similar pattern drills. These can be lexically-based, as well as grammatical. Below is an example from an intermediate level (B1) course book (Crace & Wileman, 2002, p. 4) in which learners are asked to match gradable and extreme adjectives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>hot</th>
<th>fascinating</th>
<th>good</th>
<th>packed</th>
<th>boiling</th>
<th>interesting</th>
<th>tired</th>
<th>enormous</th>
<th>crowded</th>
<th>bad</th>
<th>old</th>
<th>fantastic</th>
<th>awful</th>
<th>exhausted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Once this is completed, the matching adjectives can be placed in a stimulus-response transformation drill. Learners can be asked to participate chorally and then in closed A-B pairs.

**ADAPTATION (AN A-B DRILL):**

- A: Was it hot? B: Hot??!! It was boiling!
- A: Was it good? B: Good??!! It was fantastic!
- A: Was it crowded? B: Crowded? It was packed!
- A: Was it interesting? B: Interesting? It was fascinating!
- A: Were you tired? B: Tired? I was exhausted!
- A: Was it old? B: Old? It was ancient!
- A: Was it bad? B: Bad? It was awful!

Stress and intonation can be exaggerated (with gusto!). Scrivener and Underhill (2013) also ask:

> What small adjustments can I make to optimise the doable demand on the students’ learning processes? What is the minimum tweak necessary at any point in any lesson to shift an activity into the challenge zone?

In order to slightly increase learners’ degree of engagement in the pattern drill above, the level of challenge can be raised by concealing the B response when learners repeat the drill in A-B pairs, swapping roles at a point determined by the teacher or by themselves.

Taking our cue from classroom methodology and practice springing from Lewis’ (1993) *The Lexical Approach*, prioritising as it does the need to maximise any opportunities to expand and enrich learners’ lexicons, we could expand the
drill to explore and then include alternatives to the extreme adjectives above. For example:

**ADAPTATION (AN A-B DRILL):**

A Was it hot?  
B Hot??!! It was sweltering!  
A Was it good?  
B Good??!! It was brilliant/amazing!  
A Was it crowded?  
B Crowded? It was jam-packed!  
A Was it interesting?  
B Interesting? It was gripping!  
A Were you tired?  
B Tired? I was shattered!  
A Was it old?  
B Old? It was prehistoric!  
A Was it bad?  
B Bad? It was dreadful!

Lexis could be expanded further by adding more gradable adjectives and encouraging learners to look for appropriate extreme adjectives. They could then include them in a new pattern drill of their own. Examples might include: small, hungry, thirsty, dirty, big (respectively: tiny, starving/famished/ravenous, filthy, huge).

The same technique can be used at lower levels, for example, with adjectives and their antonyms: the adjectives are taught, matched and practised in any way deemed appropriate. They can then be inserted into a pattern drill, where, again, pitch and intonation can be exaggerated for playfulness and memorability.

**OPPOSITES OF ADJECTIVES**

| Is it good? | No, it’s really awful! |
| Is it easy? | No, it’s really hard! |
| Is it near? | far! |
| Is it cheap? | expensive! |
| Is it warm? | cold! |
| Is it clean? | dirty! |
| Is it safe? | dangerous! |
| Is it exciting? | boring! |

**TEACHER-TALK IN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING**

Within Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), a teacher behaviour that trainees and teachers are encouraged to address and drastically reduce is that often referred to as TTT: Teacher Talking Time. There are many valid reasons for this:

- Excessive teacher talk limits the amount of STT (Student Talking Time).
- It often results in the teacher spending a great amount of time addressing
the class, which can become disengaging for learners as concentration and pace suffer.

- TTT often means that the teacher is “telling” the students things that they could be working out for themselves. Again, this can often lead to lack of involvement. It also means that opportunities are limited to check whether learners have understood.
- If TTT is purposeless and little more than babble, it can become confusing and frustrating for learners and therefore demotivating.
- Excessive TTT often means that the teacher takes the lead in all exchanges, which is not a natural discourse model.
- Excessive TTT often leads to an excessively controlling Teacher and reduces learner autonomy.

However, purposeful Teacher Talk can be designed by the teacher to afford opportunities for Live Listening (or Teacher Talk Listening): the teacher engages in natural communication with the class. For example, they can tell a (mainly unscripted) story, a joke, a personal anecdote, an incident that has happened to them. They can ‘rough-tune’ their language so that it is just a notch above learners’ level, but through the use of mime, gesture, voice and other supporting techniques they can ensure comprehension. There are several advantages, one of the main ones being that learners are exposed to genuine, real-time communication containing all the features of natural, spoken English, e.g. hesitations, false starts, connected speech.

Another important advantage is that by rough-tuning their language so it is slightly above the learners’ current level of comprehension, the teacher is in effect creating the ideal conditions in Krashen’s (1982/2009) terms for language acquisition: the Input Hypothesis.

More generally, how do we move from stage \( i \), where \( i \) represents current competence, to \( i + 1 \), the next level? The input hypothesis makes the following claim: a necessary (but not sufficient) condition to move from stage \( i \) to stage \( i + 1 \) is that the acquirer understand input that contains \( i + 1 \), where “understand” means that the acquirer is focussed on the meaning and not the form of the message.

We acquire, in other words, only when we understand language that contains structure that is “a little beyond” where we are now. How is this possible? How can we understand language that contains structures that we have not yet acquired? The answer to this apparent paradox is that we use more than our linguistic competence to help us understand. We also use context, our knowledge of the world, our extra-linguistic information to help us understand language directed at us. (Krashen, 1982/2009, pp. 20-21)
To provide such comprehensible input +1 in the classroom, the following procedure is suggested:

1. Prepare a brief story, joke, or personal anecdote.
2. Learners listen for a first time as you tell it clearly and slowly, supported by mime and gestures, visuals and taking care to ‘punch’ key words, to pause and to pace delivery.
3. Prepare a handout, or write on the board or project onto the screen the prompts/skeleton of the story.
4. Tell learners that soon they are going to tell the story to each other, using the prompts on the board. They must tell the story in the same sequence as the prompts.
5. Ask them to mentally prepare the story (no writing).
6. Learners listen a second time as you tell the story again as the learners follow the prompts.
7. Learner A starts to tell the story to Learner B. After an appropriate time, call out ‘Change’ and Learner B continues the story. Repeat the ‘Change!’ procedure several times until the story has been told.

An example follows:

**THE VAMPIRE BAT RETURNS**

A young vampire bat came flapping in from the night, covered in fresh blood, with blood dripping from its mouth, and perched himself on the roof of the cave to get some sleep.

Before long, all the other bats smelled the blood and began hassling him about where he got it. He was tired and needing a rest, so he told them to please leave him alone. However, it was clear that he wasn’t going to get any sleep until he satisfied their curiosity.

“OK!” he said with exasperation, “follow me,” and he swooped out of the cave with hundreds of bats following close behind him.

Over the mountain they flew, down through the valley, across the river and into the deep forest. Finally he slowed down and stopped. All the other bats excitedly gathered around him.

“Is this the place? Is this the place?” the bats asked excitedly.

“Do you see that tree over there?” he asked.

“Yes, yes, yes!” the bats all screamed in a frenzy.

“Good,” said the first bat, “Because I DIDN’T!”
The prompts displayed after the first telling were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE VAMPIRE BAT RETURNS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vampire bat returns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bats/blood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OK. Follow me!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swoops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stops/bats gather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes/scream/frenzy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well ................!!!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This technique can perhaps be viewed as an example of Demand High Listening: at Step 6 the learners listen for a second time very carefully indeed to the sequencing and the details. There is also a shift from a focus on listening towards some intensive work on accuracy as they try and re-tell the story, which becomes, in effect, a third listening. It also encourages learners to ‘notice’ (in Schmidt’s terms) language features that they very likely will not have attended to in the first telling of the joke.

**PPP: PRESENT-PRACTICE-PRODUCE**

The Present-Practice-Produce model is a familiar paradigm in Communicative Language Teaching. It probably originated in the early days of CLT when there was little focus on form and all tasks were entirely communicative. This interpretation of CLT is often referred to as ‘hard CLT’ and, in order to make CLT more palatable to those brought up on Grammar-Translation and Audiolingual models of learning, the PPP model began to appear as a model for lessons which contained a grammatical focus: ‘soft CLT’.

**FIGURE 1: PPP – THE STAGES AND EXAMPLES**

![PPP Diagram]

- **PRESENTATION**
- **PRACTICE**
- **PRODUCTION**
The three stages of PPP, together with an example lesson designed to present and practise *used to*, are included in the table below.

**TABLE 1: PPP STAGES AND EXAMPLE LESSON**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presentation</th>
<th>Example Lesson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The first stage of PPP, Presentation, often consists of a situation or text in which the language structure being taught (the Target Language) is introduced and aspects of meaning/use, form and presentation are highlighted. | Learners are presented with pictures of a young man with little money. He lives in a small bedsit/room, rides a bike, smokes cigarettes and drinks beer. They are then presented with pictures of the same man many years later: he is rich, lives in a villa, drives a big car, smokes cigars and drinks champagne. He is interviewed by a journalist, who asks him questions about his past. The rich man says:  
*i used to..... be poor.*  
*i used to....live in a bedsit.*  
*i used to ...ride a bike/smoke.*  
*cigarettes/drink beer.*  
Learners repeat these sentences focussing on accuracy of pronunciation. The teacher checks that the meaning is clear and highlights the form of the *used to* structure. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The second stage, Practice, typically contains exercises designed to help learners become more familiar and confident with the target language through frequent use/repeated examples of the target language. Although traditional written practice is included in this stage, a greater emphasis is typically placed on oral practice, which can be of two main types: ‘Controlled’ practice tends to be ‘mechanical’, with very limited room for non-target language; ‘Semi-controlled’ practice tends to be more ‘communicative’ and allows more room for spontaneous language (together with repeated examples of the target language). Typical examples include information gap activities (also known as communicative grammar practice activities) and ‘communication games’. In both controlled and semi-controlled practice activities, the focus is on the (usually oral) production of accurate utterances containing different examples of the target grammar structure. | (i) Learners do an exercise which provides controlled written practice of *used to*.  
(ii) Learners think of one thing they *used to be/think/look like/wear* etc. They work in groups of 6-10, stand up and walk around and tell everybody in their group one-by-one their *used to* sentence. They also have to listen to and remember all the *used to* sentences. The teacher then asks a volunteer from each group to repeat all the different things their colleagues *used to* (do). |
PRODUCTION

In the third and final stage of the sequence, Production (sometimes referred to as ‘Freer Practice’), learners engage in a (semi-) realistic situation where they feel the need to actively apply the language. The focus is more on fluency but it is intended that the situation will engender lots of opportunities to apply the target language.

Learners are divided into groups of 4. Learners A and B are a couple who have been married for 10 years. At first they had a lot of bad habits (they decide what these were) but now they no longer have them. Their lives have also changed in other ways (they decide what these are). Learners C and D are journalists who have to interview the couple (A and B) about ways in which their lives have changed over these last ten years. They prepare some questions. Then C and D interview A and B in an (unscripted) role play.

The PPP model is quite straightforward and neat and is structured clearly enough to be satisfying to learners and easily understood and used by new teachers and teachers early in their careers. However, it has received a lot of criticism in recent years and as a result perhaps seems to be no longer in fashion (although many teachers when pressed will admit to using it). This is regrettable because it is highly effective in terms of focussing on a single language point and only needs some modification to qualify it for rescue and reinstatement.

PPP: criticisms and responses

The PPP model has received many criticisms over the past two decades. Most of these are usefully summarised and discussed in Evans (1999). The main objections to PPP and this author’s own responses/modifications are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITICISM</th>
<th>RESPONSE / MODIFICATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PPP creates the impression that grammar is the key to learning a new language.</td>
<td>As long as in the programme/syllabus there is a balance of focus on the four communicative skills supported by work on grammar, lexis, phonology and discourse, this should not be a problem. PPP can be utilised as a tool – another option from a toolbox of options – that can be utilised when the teacher wants/needs to focus on a language structure that learners are having particular difficulty with and/or for which a PPP approach may be the most effective tool.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If learners are not willing to learn or ready to learn, that particular grammar point, the whole lesson can be a waste of time.

The teacher’s experience of the class, and of previous classes, should be sufficient for them to be aware of this beforehand. Less experienced teachers can give their learners a short diagnostic test/activity to ascertain learners’ readiness for instruction in this particular grammar point.

Learners never really get a chance to practise realistic communication. In the third stage, any ‘production’ will be so influenced by the heavy grammar focus and the previous controlled practice stage, that learners will try to reproduce that grammar point rather than try to communicate – they will focus on the form and structure rather than on the meaning of the message they are trying to communicate.

This is a valid objection. For a solution, see the revised PPP model below.

The third stage, Production, comes too early for the language structure to have been internalised. If the activity is motivating and engaging, learners will completely forget the structure – which is useful if the aim is really fluency, but it isn’t: the stage is designed to generate more examples of the target language.

Again, this is a valid objection. For a solution, see the revised PPP model below.

---

**Rescuing PPP: from production to ‘personalisation for speaking fluency’**

As we have seen above, a main criticism of PPP is that the third stage, Production, does not really result in realistic communication – learners are so focused on the form that their ‘conversation’ sounds too artificial, littered as it is with examples of the target language. However, sometimes the activity is so intrinsically motivating that the learners completely forget to use the target language: this is completely understandable, not least because the target language has not had enough time to be fully processed and internalised (acquired) yet. But although what is produced often does seem closer to realistic communication, it does not fulfil the main aim of the third step in the paradigm: the production of more examples of the target language.

Can we rescue PPP? The proposed solution is to abandon the P for Production stage and substitute it with another P: P for ‘Personalisation and Speaking Fluency’. In this stage, learners write a true sentence about themselves using the target language. In groups, learners can then be asked to interview each of their colleagues in turn, perhaps with the instruction that each learner should be asked a minimum number of questions by their fellow group members. The activity can be modelled by the teacher, as an authentic personalised demonstration.
For example, with the used to example above, the teacher can write a true and, if possible, interesting sentence about themselves, e.g. I used to (have blue hair/play the piano/run marathons/want to be an astronaut/believe in fairies etc.). Learners can then interview the teacher, perhaps prompted by question prompts on the board, e.g. Why/when/how long/did etc.

The teacher answers expansively and extensively, which results in more questions from the floor. Each learner then writes their own true sentence (they can use the one from the Controlled Practice activity or another one – but it must be true) and are interviewed by their colleagues for a predetermined minimum amount of time. Afterwards, the teacher does a debriefing session when learners tell the class surprising things they have learned about their classmates and also follows up by a focus on some of the language used during the interviews.

CONCLUSION

For many teachers, what is important in the classroom is not whether what they do is supported by current research and theory but whether it seems to have beneficial effects on learners. Indeed, Swan (1985) advises us that whenever we are presented with a new approach we should not ask, “Is it true?”, but ‘What good does it do?’” (p. 87). He encourages us to “try out new techniques without giving up useful older methods, simply because they have been ‘proved wrong’” (Swan, 1985, p. 87). Many discarded techniques and approaches can be re-examined, slightly modified and effectively used in the modern classroom: don’t throw out the baby with the bathwater!

alanmarshinmalta@gmail.com
REFERENCES


In this article I examine what digital literacies are, and unpick the notion of digital literacy to work towards a taxonomy of the sub-literacies which make up the umbrella term itself. This is done primarily with reference to the work of Dudeney, Hockly and Pegrum (2013), but also through the lens of Belshaw’s (2012) work.
WHAT ARE DIGITAL LITERACIES?

It is a very wired world (albeit a predominately social one), and we live in always-on societies where new skills are gradually being identified and coming to the forefront in education. These twenty-first century skills are starting to appear in curricula around the world as governments, education authorities and educators recognize a need to equip learners with new skills to complement the old. Whereas once the aim of traditional, formal education was to ensure that those leaving school were sufficiently skilled in what, in the United Kingdom at least, were called the three Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic), the focus is now gradually turning to a need to ensure that young people leave formal education equipped to deal with an increasingly connected world, and with a skillset that will allow them to prepare for new jobs, and new ways of working.

In the United States one can read of the need to address ‘new media literacies’ and ‘twenty-first century skills’ in education, in Australia there is much talk of ‘digital literacy skills’, and in countries as far apart as Finland and Spain one can find increasingly frequent references to ‘digital competences’. In most cases, these literacies are set to play a fundamental part in the education of all young people as they progress through their formal education.

Whilst the terminology may vary on its journey around the globe, the concept remains the same: digital literacy, at its heart, refers to the concept of understanding – and making best use of – the current technology toolset available to each individual. This does not merely involve the acquisition of a set of discrete skills (such as the ability to, for example, use a spreadsheet to take care of personal accounts) but rather extends the use of technology into areas with which, perhaps, it is not traditionally associated. The new digitally literate individual knows how to accomplish goals, but also understands why these goals are important, and what relationship they have with the wider world around them. Knowing how to use Facebook is a skill; knowing how to use it to build a community of like-minded individuals and to use that community for professional and personal development is a literacy. Herein lies the difference.

Skills are not unimportant, but it is in the application of these skills, in the way they interconnect and interact, that true literacy is acquired. As such, digital literacies encompass a wide variety of skills and knowledge, from being able to install new software through to an understanding of copyright, social networks, digital footprints and beyond.

How then do we break down and categorise these new literacies?
A TAXONOMY OF DIGITAL LITERACIES

In recent years a variety of ways of classifying and describing digital literacies have been proposed. Pegrum (2011; Dudeney, Hockly, & Pegrum, 2013) explores these new literacies in some detail, dividing them into four main areas: language, information, connections, and (re)design.

A focus on language

These are key digital literacies that focus on communication via the language of text, image and multimedia, and include:

Print literacy: the ability to read and produce online text, such as blog entries, tweets, emails etc. This is clearly related to traditional print literacy, but includes an awareness of online text genres. This requires some familiarity on the part of the teacher, particularly when working with the writing skill; as email and synchronous chat overtake the use of more formal letter writing, an awareness of genre, register and appropriacy will become ever more important.

Texting literacy: an awareness of the conventions of texting language (abbreviations, acronyms, symbols etc.), and of knowing in what contexts to use or not use it. Whilst print literacy is a familiar typology, texting literacy remains the domain of regular mobile phone users and is much maligned in educational circles for the purported detrimental effect it is having on literacy. In fact, as Crystal (2008) points out, “typically less than ten per cent of the words in text messages are actually abbreviated in any way”.

Hypertext literacy: an understanding of how hyperlinks in online text work, and being able to produce texts with effective use of hyperlinking. Here we might include knowing how many hyperlinks to include in a text and why, what to link to, understanding the effects of over- (or under-) linking in a text, and so on. Hypertext literacy also extends beyond the producer to the consumer, to issues of focus, concentration and multi-tasking. In an age where everything is linked to something else, hypertext literacy demands that we consider how people read online, and how to keep them focused on particular sources, resources and tasks.

Visual, media and multimedia literacy: an understanding of how images and multimedia (audio, video) can be used to supplement, enhance, subvert or even replace text communication. There is also an underlying need to produce multimodal messages ourselves, from sharing our photos on Facebook to creating video clips for YouTube. In the age of Web 2.0 we are no longer passive consumers who need to learn how to sit back and critique mass media (although this is still a key skill). We are now ‘prosumers’ (producers and consumers) of multimedia artefacts.

Gaming literacy: a macro literacy involving kinaesthetic and spatial skills, and the ability to navigate online worlds (such as Second Life) or use gaming consoles such as the Wii. Although at first glance this literacy may seem unconnected to...
education, there is a growing interest in serious games for education. From flipped classroom style game-based learning initiatives such as the Khan Academy (http://www.khanacademy.org/) through the rise of gamification in social learning to projects such as Mozilla’s Open Badges project (http://openbadges.org), there is a growing recognition of the power of games and learning challenges to engage some groups of learners. For more on gaming in ELT, see Stanley and Mawer (2011).

**Mobile literacy:** an understanding of how mobile technology is transforming our world, from issues of hyperconnectivity (always being connected to the Internet), to understanding how to use geolocation and augmented reality. As suggested above, mobile phones themselves are perceived as somewhat problematic in class, where issues of focus and concentration appear to clash with having connected devices in the hands of learners. This is exacerbated in the language class, where perceptions of a resultant lowering in the quality of language produced by learners are coupled with teacher anxiety that an over-reliance on translation and phrasebook style apps and resources may impact on the independence of learners. Many of these concerns are a result of teacher misunderstanding of how mobile devices are used by younger learners, but also result from draconian policies that prohibit the use of such devices in school. Key to acquiring mobile literacy and integrating it into the classroom are school policies regarding acceptable mobile use, as well as negotiation between teacher and learners as to best practice in class.

**Code and technological literacy:** apart from basic technical skills (such as knowing how to use a word processing program, or how to send an attachment by email), a basic knowledge of html coding can help us understand how online tools and products are put together and, more importantly, enable us to make changes to these to overcome limitations. As Rushkoff (2010) puts it, “If we don’t learn to program, we risk being programmed ourselves” (p. 133). We are not talking here about becoming fully-fledged computer programmers, but rather about developing an awareness of the basics. Very basic coding skills can help one customise the elements in one’s blog for example, or route around censorship (for good or bad). A renewed interest in computer programming and related code skills can be seen in many countries around the globe, including the United Kingdom, where initiatives such as the Raspberry Pi (http://www.raspberrypi.org) have brought cheap, programmable computers to schools across the country. Social networks such as CoderDojo (http://coderdojo.com) have sprung up to fill the knowledge gaps in the teaching body, allowing young people to jointly develop these vital skills.
A focus on information

These are key digital literacies that focus on how we find information and resources, how we evaluate them and how we store them for later retrieval. They include:

Search literacy: the ability to search for information effectively online. This includes an awareness of search engines beyond Google, including visual search engines, voice-driven search engines, and specialized search engines concentrating on single resource types. Arguably the most basic and vital of the literacies, search literacy is increasingly important in an age where the production – and sharing – of online resources is spiralling out of control and data management is becoming increasingly challenging. Getting to what we are looking for is more of a challenge than it has ever been.

Information literacy: coupled with effective search literacy, information literacy is the ability to evaluate online sources of information for veracity, and credibility. In this age of information overload, we also need to augment these two skills with filtering and attention literacy so as to know what to pay attention to and what not – and when. Information literacy requires a heightening of critical analysis of resources, an ability to judge and evaluate the utility of those resources and an ability to use them in the service of our learning.

Tagging literacy: knowing how to tag (or label) online content, how to create tag clouds and to contribute to ‘folksonomies’ (user created banks of tags). As resources become more plentiful, there is an increased need to be able to classify, label, store and retrieve sites and information. Moving beyond simple bookmarking in browsers, tagging literacy moves classification systems online, into a more social space where scattered groups of users contribute to a group’s knowledge and access to information by keeping a shared repository of relevant data.

A focus on connections

These literacies come to the forefront in social networking spaces and other online media where personalisation occurs. They may include blogs and wikis, as well as social networks such as Facebook. In such spaces users not only write about themselves and their lives, but also participate in wide social groupings that transcend more closed groupings in terms of ethnicity, religion, geography, etc. They include:

Personal literacy: knowing how to create, project and curate our online identity. This includes an awareness of issues such as online safety or identity theft. Knowing what to share – and with whom – has huge implications not only for our personal lives, but also for our professional image and our career trajectory. What is amusing as a 16-year-old can be severely detrimental as a 25-year-old, and understanding the potential impact of our digital footprints is key to managing them. As Schmidt (as cited in Jenkins Jr., 2010) observes, “I don’t believe society understands what happens when everything is available, knowable and recorded
by everyone all the time,” predicting that in the near future young people may be obliged to change their identities to escape their digital pasts. If, as teachers, we encourage the use of social and creative platforms in our classrooms, then we have a duty of care to ensure that our learners are engaging safely and constructively.

**Network literacy:** the ability to take part in online networks and to leverage these to help us filter and find information. For teachers, their PLN (Personal Learning Network) – online professional contacts – can be useful as a means of tapping into on-going professional development. Network literacy is about pure connections, about how people share and transfer information from one grouping to another. In many ways network literacy has obvious parallels in early communities of practice theory with its core and boundary members and their interactions inside and outside a given group.

**Participatory literacy:** closely aligned to network literacy, participatory literacy involves contributing to and participating in online networks. This equates to something over and above merely reading professional development tweets on Twitter, but contributing your own tweets. Not just reading blog posts, but leaving comments – or even writing your own blog. Participatory literacy is the lifeblood of the post Web 2.0 social era of distributed computing, where what you share is what you are. In this sense, many of the major implications of personal literacy also hold for this skill.

**Cultural and intercultural literacy:** understanding digital artefacts from other cultures, and interacting effectively and constructively with people from other cultures takes on even more importance in our global world, where intercultural contact via digital communication is increasingly possible and increasingly likely. As learning projects become more globalised, more exchange-based, learning how to interact with other cultures is key – not only to successful completion of a given project, but further on, with wider implications in the professional sphere.

**A focus on (re)design**

A macro literacy that refers to the ability to repurpose or change already-made content in order to create something new. Typically associated with multimedia expression, the sole literacy in this group is:

**Remix literacy:** this refers to the modern trend of ‘remixing’ pictures, videos and other media, to often striking effect. This may refer, for example, to the trend for making ‘literal versions’ of music videos (http://tinyurl.com/l397zp), through remixing music videos for political or satirical ends (http://preview.tinyurl.com/yffhgnb) to the doctoring of digital images such as that afforded by sites such as Photofunia (http://www.photofunia.com). This literacy is also closely associated with Internet ‘memes’ (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meme). In each instance, recognition of the ‘remix’ that has taken place is crucial to an understanding of the media being viewed.
ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF DIGITAL LITERACIES

Belshaw (2012) identifies eight essential elements of digital literacies:

1. **Cultural:** this refers to an understanding of the different digital contexts we may encounter online, from more traditional, structured environments such as school Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) to less organised spaces such as Facebook. As we move between these environments we are encouraged to change the way we interact and operate. In Web 1.0 terminology this might equate to the notion of netiquette, whilst in language learning terms we may think of notions such as register and genre, and a need to accommodate to different situations.

2. **Cognitive:** here the focus is on cognitive ability and critical awareness, rather than on any kind of technology tools; the cognitive element is concerned with critical appraisal of media and media sources, with an aim to helping develop strategies for learners to “see nuance where they have previously seen dichotomy” (Belshaw, 2012, p. 208).

3. **Constructive:** the constructive element refers to a more participatory and contributory approach to content, to the concept of creating something new (either original, or a remix of something already in existence). In this element there are clear pointers to related concepts of copyright, plagiarism, Creative Commons, and similar.

4. **Communicative:** clearly much of what we do online involves an element of communication, particularly as we move further into the production side, and engage with the contributory aspects of networked environments. This element refers to our ability to interact successfully in these environments.

5. **Confident:** this refers to a sense of confidence and well-being mediated by technologies; a confidence born of the ability to step backwards, to undo actions and try them again, a confidence that is inspired by working in safe environments where experimentation is encouraged, and where ‘learning by doing’ is the norm. It is, perhaps, the skill of using technology over being used by technology.

6. **Creative:** the creative element refers to understanding and defining new ways of learning and of acquiring knowledge and experience. It is closely allied with confident experimentation, and with learning to put new tools to work for us in order to achieve new aims and outcomes.

7. **Critical:** here we need to consider the skill of evaluating, tagging and curating the resources that come our way, understanding them at a relatively deep and critical level. This element squares with Pegrum’s literacies with a focus on information (Pegrum, 2011; Dudeney, Hockly, & Pegrum, 2013) and an ability to manage the information flow and information overload.

8. **Civic:** as technologies afford better connections and communications, they also encourage civic action and the development of ‘Civil Society’ (Belshaw, 2012), more engagement on a societal level and can encourage civil action below the usual layers of government and state. Such disruptive use of technologies is often perceived as challenging by more traditional entities, though much of it tends to
reside in the practice of ‘slacktivism’ whereby social change is attempted through disapproval and protest online.

CONCLUSION

In both explorations of digital literacies there is a clear emphasis on both the conceptual nature of much of the content (rather than a list of practical skills to be acquired), and also a clear suggestion that these change and mutate as we explore them. In these early days of digital literacy it is hard to see a complete picture. Indeed a complete picture may not be possible as new technology affordances and demands will inevitably change and mutate the original concepts, leading to new skills and literacies that may take on greater importance as they become more apparent and better observed.

Clearly, then, this is a complicated mix of skills and elements to master, and teachers can play a part in helping learners acquire some of the necessary skills by integrating them into their classroom practice alongside the regular ‘content’ they deal with. In this way they can make a difference in their learners’ comfort level, helping them beyond the ‘tech comfy’ to the ‘tech savvy’ which will contribute to their life beyond school as they move into the professional workplace and (increasingly) knowledge-based economies.

gavin.dudeney@theconsultants-e.com
REFERENCES


ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Daniel Xerri teaches English at the University of Malta Junior College and lectures on the university’s MA in TESOL. Between 2011 and 2015, he chaired the EFL Monitoring Board, a regulatory body within the Ministry for Education and Employment in Malta. He sits on the IATEFL Research SIG committee and has participated in a number of international projects conducted by the European Centre for Modern Languages. Xerri holds postgraduate degrees in English and Applied Linguistics, and is currently completing a PhD in Education at the University of York. His main research interest is teacher education and development in ELT. In 2013, he was awarded the Terry Furlong Prize for Research by the National Association for the Teaching of English in the United Kingdom. At the 2014 ELTons ceremony, the British Council awarded him and a group of colleagues from the Junior College the Innovation in Assessment Prize. Xerri is the author of a number of peer-reviewed articles and book chapters. Further details about his work can be found at: www.danielxerri.com

Odette Vassallo is director of the Centre for English Language Proficiency and lecturer in English Language Studies at the Department of English, University of Malta. She has teaching and researching interest in applied linguistics. She read for her undergraduate degree in English at the University of Malta, followed by an MA and a PhD at the University of Nottingham, UK. Before joining the University of Malta, she had a career at the University of Malta Junior College where she taught English language and literature and pursued her research in the field of applied linguistics. She has presented at international conferences and is involved in a number of research projects, in the areas of applied linguistics, pedagogical stylistics, learner corpora, SLA and the learner reader. She is actively involved in the implementation of a support structure designed to improve and enhance proficiency levels in English of those students reading for a degree at the University of Malta.
Koray Akyazı is an English instructor and member of the academic and professional development center in the Foreign Language Preparatory School at Gediz University, Turkey. He holds a BA in Business Management from Huddersfield University, a TESOL certificate from I-to-I, and a Cambridge ESOL CELTA from Izmir Economy University. He is also on his way to gaining an MA in ELT from Bahcesehir University. His areas of interest include teacher research, peer observation, and reflective practice.

Mario Aquilina is a lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Malta, where he teaches literary theory, style, rhetoric and writing. He is the author of The Event of Style in Literature, published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2014. Aquilina was awarded a PhD in English Studies from the University of Durham in 2013.

Larissa Attard has worked in the field of ELT in Malta for the past 25 years: first as a teacher, then as a Director of Studies and, more recently, as a freelancer. Active on local TEFL Cert courses as a teacher trainer, Attard also mentors on the CertTESOL programme and is a regular contributor at local ELT workshops. She has held posts on committees for the local authority governing EFL matters and has been appointed Academic School Visitor and TEFL Cert Assessor in an academic assurance capacity at national accreditation level. Attard also lectures at local colleges and is a Senior Visiting Lecturer at the University of Malta. Involved in writing materials for a variety of ELT-related concerns, she has recently been one of the main contributors to an ELT course book using a CLIL approach. Larissa’s areas of interest include action research, language use, and teaching methods.

Evarist Bartolo is Malta’s Minister for Education and Employment. He has been a member of the Maltese Parliament since 1992, working mostly in education, European affairs and tourism. In 1975, Bartolo graduated from the University of Malta with a BA (Hons) in English Literature. In 1984, he was awarded a scholarship for a diploma course in journalism at Stanford University. He then read for a Master’s in Education at the University of Cardiff, which he completed in 1986. Bartolo spent three years teaching at De La Salle College, another four years at the national broadcasting station and then a further ten years as the editor and head of news of the Labour Party media. He currently lectures in Communication Studies at the University of Malta. Bartolo is a prolific writer, having been a consistent contributor to the local media since his early teens. He is considered to be one of the principal ideologists within the Malta Labour Party.
Simon Borg has been involved in ELT for over 25 years. He has worked in a range of international contexts and is known particularly for his work on language teacher cognition and teacher education. After 15 years at the University of Leeds, where he was a Professor of TESOL, he now works full-time as an ELT consultant, focusing mainly on the design, delivery, evaluation and study of language teacher development programmes and projects. Full details of his work are available at http://simon-borg.co.uk

Caroline Campbell is currently the Director of Studies of Easy School of Languages. She began her ELT profession in 2001 in Italy, where she lived for 10 years. She has gained her experience from teaching students of all ages and levels, both in monolingual and multilingual environments, in Italy and Malta. Four years ago she moved into educational management and became increasingly involved in teacher training. Campbell is keen on continuing professional development and enjoys sharing ideas through workshops and presentations at local and international seminars and conferences. In recent years she has designed and delivered various training courses in ELT methodology and CLIL for European teachers within the ERASMUS+ programme.

Kenan Dikilitaş is an Assistant Professor in the department of English language teacher education at Hasan Kalyoncu University, Turkey, and a committee member of the IATEFL Research SIG. He is particularly interested in language teacher education with a focus on contemporary professional development models based on exploration, reflection and research – process-based and bottom-up approaches to the professional development of teachers. His major professional interest includes supporting and facilitating teacher action research in higher education. Dikilitaş has edited collections of teacher research studies conducted by instructors.

Gavin Dudeney is Director of Technology for The Consultants-E, working primarily in online training in EdTech, and in consultancy work in the same field. Former Honorary Secretary and Chair of the Electronics Committee (ElCom) at IATEFL, he now serves on the board of the International House Trust. A regular contributor to journals, Dudeney is author of *The Internet & the Language Classroom* (CUP 2000, 2007) and co-author – with Nicky Hockly – of the award-winning publications *How To Teach English with Technology* (Longman 2007, winner of the International House Ben Warren Prize) and *Digital Literacies* (Routledge 2013, winner of the Society of Authors British Council Award). His latest book, *Going Mobile*, was published by DELTA Publishing in 2014.
Jeremy Harmer has an international reputation as an author, teacher trainer and expert in ELT methodology. He has trained teachers and offered seminars all over the world. He is the author of methodology titles including How to Teach Writing, How to Teach English, The Practice of English Language Teaching and Essential Teacher Knowledge, all published by Pearson ELT. He is the General Editor of the Longman Methodology List. His teaching days were spent in Mexico and the UK and since 1983 he has been a full-time writer and freelance trainer. His course materials and teachers’ guides are used all over the world.

Alan Marsh has been a full-time EFL teacher for 37 years. Much of his work nowadays consists of training and developing other teachers, both pre-service and in-service, on local and international training courses including Cambridge ESOL CELTA and DELTA and on Erasmus+ (formerly Comenius) training projects. He was a founding member of MATEFL, of which he is the serving President and regularly contributes articles to teacher publications in Malta and the UK. He is the author of Exploring English. In 2014, he was awarded the Inspiring ELT Professional Award in recognition of his contribution to Malta’s ELT industry.

Stephanie Xerri Agius teaches English at the University of Malta Junior College. She holds postgraduate degrees in English Literature and Applied Linguistics. Xerri Agius is currently conducting doctoral research at the University of Leicester. Her research focuses on the feedback practices involved in the teaching of writing. She has also presented at a number of conferences in Malta and abroad.
Effective ELT professionals are primarily effective learners. They value the development of their own knowledge, skills and beliefs. They refuse to stagnate as professionals. They embrace learning, its joys and its challenges. ELT professionals can lead by example by demonstrating the attitudes of effective learners. They can act as role models by being fully engaged with the lifelong learning process. The papers in this book address the issue of ELT professionals’ learning development by either showcasing how they can position themselves as learners or by discussing pedagogical approaches that can enrich classroom practices.

This book brings together the perspectives of a group of international and Maltese experts in ELT, all of whom address the idea that learning needs to be an intrinsic part of the identity of ELT professionals. The book consists of a selection of papers based on talks and workshops delivered at the 3rd ELT Malta conference. The papers by Simon Borg, Larissa Attard, and Kenan Dikilitaş and Koray Akyazı focus on how teacher research can act as a form of professional learning. Writing is the focus of the papers by Caroline Campbell, Mario Aquilina and Stephanie Xerri Agius, each author approaching the subject from somewhat different angles. The papers by Alan Marsh and Gavin Dudeney explore the idea that in order to better address the needs of learners in the 21st century, ELT professionals are required to demonstrate the ability to repackage their existent knowledge as well as develop new competences.

The world of English Language Teaching is constantly turning. That is why the articles in this collection are so timely and so important. — Jeremy Harmer

This book highlights ways in which ELT professionals may continue to develop their knowledge, skills and beliefs in order for teaching to be more effective in its endeavour to knock at the doors of learners’ minds. — Evarist Bartolo