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The newsletter  
of the IATEFL Young  
Learners and  
Teenagers Special  
Interest Group

# TEYLT Worldwide

Issue 1, 2020



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yltsig.iatefl.org



# Innovative, Creative, Collaborative, Global.

**An ELT consultancy building progressive strategies for change.**



The **diversity of the work** and the **amazing support** that TransformELT gave to consultants led to dynamic projects that have focused on sustainability and building capabilities within the countries.

**Adrian Tennant,**  
**Freelance Teacher Trainer**

The Inspectors and Ministry Officials appreciated the **respectful and collaborative approach** of the team. Highly recommended!

**Susan Linklater**  
**British Council, Algeria**



I found TransformELT to be a **hugely knowledgeable and professional organisation**. The work was underpinned by a clear understanding of ELT methodology and current trends in language learning. The work by TransformELT has helped shape our continued product development.

**David Bunker**  
**ELT Materials Writer**

TransformELT are consistently able to put together **highly qualified, experienced teams** with an educational ethos of professional learning, reciprocal coaching and reflective practice.

**Julie Wallis, Director, The London School, Tiene, Italy**

**2017 - 2020:**  
**28 projects in**  
**23 countries**

- |               |            |
|---------------|------------|
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| Angola        | Guinae     |
| Bangladesh    | Greece     |
| Cambodia      | Kazakhstan |
| Cameroon      | Kuwait     |
| Cote D'ivoire | Mali       |
| Cuba          | Niger      |
| Djibouti      | Senegal    |
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## OUR COMMITTEE

# Meet *the* Team



**David Valente**



SIG Coordinator

**Amanda Davies**



Joint Publications Editor

**Joan Kang Shin**



Joint Publications Editor

**Sinem Daridere**



Digital Coordinator

**Bruno Andrade**



Public Relations Coordinator

**Simon Pounder**



Business Development Coordinator

**Stephanie Xerri Agius**



Social Media Coordinator

**Helen Chapman**



**Leticia Moraes**



**Maria Jesus Inostroza**



Joint Events Coordinators

## FROM THE EDITOR

### Dear Readers

Welcome to this edition of *TEYLT Worldwide*. We hope you are all keeping safe and well during these troubling times and that some kind of normality has begun to return to your lives.

The YLTSIG Committee members have taken the decision to make this special edition open access. This is because of the high number of pieces which provide information, guidance and practical suggestions to help teachers navigate the unexpected and unplanned for changes to teaching that many of us around the world have experienced due to COVID19.



We begin with a special feature on E-Safety by **Jen Dobson** who highlights the risks online learning poses to children, caregivers and teachers, and outlines the essential changes we need to see in this area. **Olha Madylus** shares her expertise in how to make the most of online lessons, and **Marie Delaney** writes a fascinating *Hot Topics* feature on the effects of trauma on children and teenagers, and how to support them in the classroom, whether face to face or online. We also include a review by YLTSIG Business Development Coordinator **Simon Pounder** of the freely downloadable *Playbook for Emergency Remote Teaching to 6-10 Year Old Learners* by Clare Venables, Rosemere Bard, James M. Taylor and Jennifer Dobson. **David Valente** contributes a particularly timely article on marginalized groups in upper-secondary ELT materials. He has also crafted a set of inspiring teaching resources to accompany his article which you can find in the **Special Appendix**.

As always, we begin with a *Spotlight on...* and this time we are exploring sustainability. **Pulkit Vasudha** shares a framework for including sustainable development in primary and secondary language classrooms, based on a successful programme in India. An interview with **ELT Footprint (Daniel Barber, Katherine Bilsborough, Christopher Graham, Ceri Jones)** provides us with a wealth of information and resources on bringing sustainability both to our students and to our practice. **Clyde Fowle** shows us how to weave sustainability into the primary ELT curriculum and **Owain Llewellyn** looks at how we can address the climate emergency with secondary learners.

Our age range sections are brought to you by **Valéria França, Delia Kidd, Sarah M. Howell, Jill Coombs, Jo Cummins** and **Rebecca Warren**. Each article brings a fresh look at teaching children and teenagers and provides both theory and practical ideas for the classroom.

Our regular reviews section includes a range of books and resources, edited by YLTSIG Reviews Editor **Joan Kang Shin**. In addition to Simon Pounder's review, **Shelagh Rixon** provides a thorough review of the British Council publication *Children and Teachers as Co-Researchers in Indian Primary English Classrooms* by Annamaria Pinter, Rama Mathew, and Richard Smith. Finally, **Kate Gregson** shares her views on a new book from Klett publishing *Teaching English to Pre-Primary Children* by Sandie Mourão with Gail Ellis.

A big thank you to everyone who contributed to this edition. Without their time, expertise and dedication to professional development this publication would not exist.

## FROM THE EDITOR

If you'd like to contribute to the next edition of the newsletter please get in touch via [ylteditor@iatefl.org](mailto:ylteditor@iatefl.org)

Please share this special publication with your professional networks and contacts.

Amanda Davies

### YLTSIG Publications Editor – *TEYLT Worldwide*

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Views expressed in this newsletter *TEYLT Worldwide* are not necessarily those of the editor(s), of the IATEFL YLTSIG, of IATEFL or its staff or trustees.

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In accordance with our child protection and safeguarding obligations, we have required authors to seek permission from parents / legal guardians for the use of photographs of children in this publication.

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## Linking, developing and supporting YL ELT professionals worldwide during the pandemic

The IATEFL Young Learners and Teenagers Special Interest Group (YLSIG) Committee is a geographically dispersed team of volunteers with members in Brazil, Chile, France, Malta, Morocco, Norway, Poland, Thailand, Turkey and the United States. During our

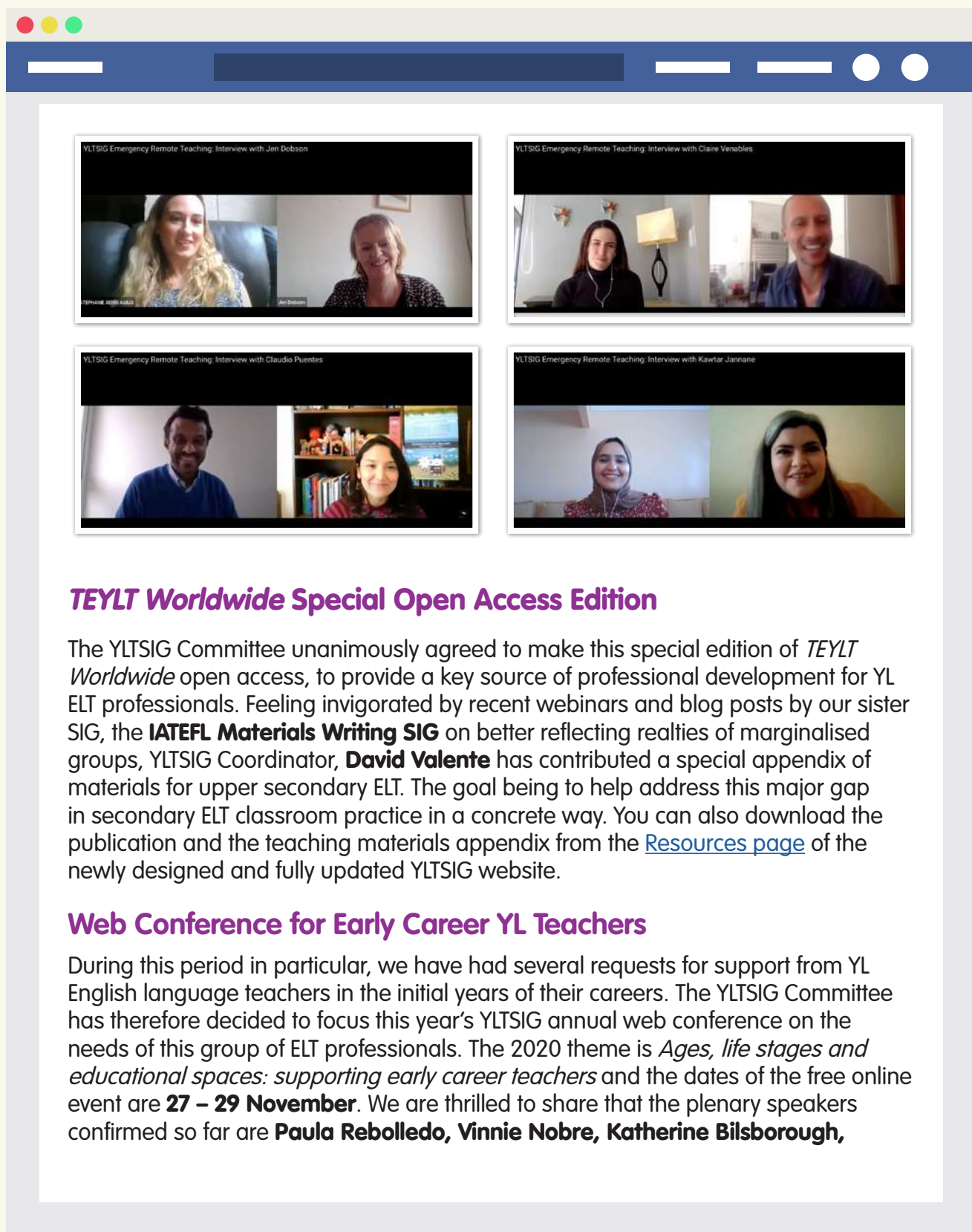
YLSIG virtual planning meeting in early April, it was particularly sobering to share the impact of the pandemic and lockdown in these different contexts. With this in mind, we set about brainstorming ways to link, develop and support the global YL ELT community during this highly challenging period. This brief article shares what we have been doing over the past few months and hopefully provides inspiration and ideas for your own ELT work with children and teenagers.

### Emergency Remote Teaching Mini Interviews

We were contacted in early April by primary ELT specialist, **Claire Venables** to provide feedback on an excellent new playbook for teaching English to primary-aged children in an emergency remote context. This had been rapidly developed by Claire and some of the Active English team in Brazil, with additional essential e-safety content by **Jen Dobson**. You can read a review of the playbook written by YLSIG Business Development Coordinator, **Simon Pounder** in this publication and freely download the digital version [here](#).

The playbook inspired the YLSIG Committee to engage with practitioners around the world via short interviews, sharing their experiences, advice and tips for emergency remote YL English teaching. This uplifting initiative was spearheaded by YLSIG Social Media Coordinator, **Stephanie Xerri Agius** with superb support from YLSIG Digital Coordinator, **Sinem Daridere**, outgoing YLSIG Public Relations Coordinator, **Bruno Andrade** as well as YLSIG Joint Events Coordinators, **Helen Chapman** and **Maria Jesus Inostroza**. Together, they interviewed 30 YL English language teachers and teacher educators in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Egypt, Iran, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Morocco, Spain and the UK. The images below capture some of the interactions and you can watch all of the interviews by visiting the [YLSIG YouTube channel](#). Please subscribe, like and comment if the interviews resonate with you and your own context.

## FROM THE COORDINATOR'S DESK



### TEYLT Worldwide Special Open Access Edition

The YLSIG Committee unanimously agreed to make this special edition of *TEYLT Worldwide* open access, to provide a key source of professional development for YL ELT professionals. Feeling invigorated by recent webinars and blog posts by our sister SIG, the **IATEFL Materials Writing SIG** on better reflecting realities of marginalised groups, YLSIG Coordinator, **David Valente** has contributed a special appendix of materials for upper secondary ELT. The goal being to help address this major gap in secondary ELT classroom practice in a concrete way. You can also download the publication and the teaching materials appendix from the [Resources page](#) of the newly designed and fully updated YLSIG website.

### Web Conference for Early Career YL Teachers

During this period in particular, we have had several requests for support from YL English language teachers in the initial years of their careers. The YLSIG Committee has therefore decided to focus this year's YLSIG annual web conference on the needs of this group of ELT professionals. The 2020 theme is *Ages, life stages and educational spaces: supporting early career teachers* and the dates of the free online event are **27 – 29 November**. We are thrilled to share that the plenary speakers confirmed so far are **Paula Rebolledo, Vinnie Nobre, Katherine Bilsborough,**

## FROM THE COORDINATOR'S DESK

**Jayaprakesh S.** and **Dan Vincent.** We are also looking for speakers to give talks who are early career teachers with a TEYL focus as well as highly experienced teachers who have TEYL insights beneficial for newer YL teachers. You can find out more about the conference and how to submit a proposal at the end of this publication.

Special thanks to TEYL WorldWide Editor, **Amanda Davies** for all her tireless work, without whom this extra special edition would not have been possible. Last, but certainly not least, thanks to **YOU** - the global YL English language teaching community of teachers, teacher educators, materials writers, researchers, academic managers and all the other unsung heroes during this global pandemic.

Looking forward to brighter days and many future collaborations.

*David*

**IATEFL YLTSIG Coordinator**



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**Early Years Keynote:**  
**Lijuan Shi**



**Primary Keynote:**  
**Hamish Chalmers**



**Secondary Keynote:**  
**Constant Leung**

**Opening Plenary:**  
**Nayr Ibrahim**



**Closing Plenary:**  
**Leketi Makalela**



# IATEFL YLTSIG PRE CONFERENCE EVENT

SHARING LANGUAGES: CELEBRATING  
CHILDREN'S AND TEENAGERS'  
MULTILINGUALISM IN ELT

**MONDAY 15 MARCH 2021 10.00 - 17.00**



# PRE CONFERENCE EVENT



## **MONDAY 15 MARCH 2021, 10.00 - 17.00** **SHARING LANGUAGES: CELEBRATING** **CHILDREN'S AND TEENAGERS'** **MULTILINGUALISM IN ELT**



**10.00 - 10.05: Welcome:** David Valente, IATEFL YLTSIG Coordinator

**10.05 - 11.05: Opening Plenary:** Nayr Ibrahim - Multilingual identities in monolingual classrooms: challenges and opportunities

**11.05 - 11.30: Break**

**11.30 - 12.15: Early Years Keynote:** Lijuan Shi - Bridging the language gap: translanguaging pedagogy in early years settings

**12.15 - 13.00: Primary Keynote:** Hamish Chalmers - Leveraging languages: the role of L1 in primary classrooms

**13.00 - 14.00: Lunch**

**14.00 - 14.45: Secondary Keynote:** Constant Leung - Using students' own languages: policy and practice in EAL contexts

**14.45 - 15.15: Open Space**

**15.15 - 15.45: Break**

**15.45 - 16.45: Closing Plenary:** Leketi Makalela - Teaching English in a multilingual world: Ubuntu translanguaging and changing classroom terrains

**16.45 - 17.00: Raffle, Evaluation & Farewell**

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## Nayr Ibrahim

# OPENING PLENARY

### **MULTILINGUAL IDENTITIES IN MONOLINGUAL CLASSROOMS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

In classrooms around the world children's and teenagers' plurilingualism is still ignored, banned and sometimes punished, with the predictable social, educational and personal consequences of rejection. In her opening plenary, Nayr Ibrahim will look at strategies to *demonolingualise* education in order to develop inclusive multilingual practices that are not dependent on particular models or approaches, and acknowledge, respect and support children's and teenagers' multilingual identities and well-being.



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## Leketi Makalele

# CLOSING PLENARY

### **TEACHING ENGLISH IN A MULTILINGUAL WORLD: UBUNTU TRANSLAGUAGING AND CHANGING CLASSROOM TERRAINS**

The teaching of English language to children and teenagers has always been biased towards monolingual ideologies that favour linear programmes of learning. In his closing plenary, Leketi Makalele will question the validity of this approach and offer alternative arguments alongside the “E” and “I” language systems to make the case for using multiple languages to optimize teaching and learning English. The plenary also considers the African cultural competence of “ubuntu” to theorize English literacy from a translanguaging perspective. The plenary will end with recommendations for practice in comparable English learning and teaching contexts.



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## Lijuan Shi

# EARLY YEARS



# KEYNOTE

### **BRIDGING THE LANGUAGE GAP: TRANSLANGUAGING PEDAGOGY IN EARLY YEARS SETTINGS**

Lijuan Shi's keynote uses video recordings from early years settings to discuss effective translanguaging strategies used by early years teachers such as bilingual recasting, codeswitching, and becoming co-learners. By drawing on the linguistic resources of children, teaching assistants and parents / caregivers, this talk will share ways teachers can also provide scaffolding for children's language development and bilingual identity formation. Challenges teachers often experience will also be addressed as well as practical solutions to overcome them.



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## Hamish Chalmers

**PRIMARY**



**KEYNOTE**

### **LEVERAGING LANGUAGES: THE ROLE OF L1 IN PRIMARY CLASSROOMS**

Multilingual learners bring learning experiences and linguistic skills to the classroom that form the foundation upon which new learning is built. Primary classroom practice that reflects our multilingual societies and creates space for multilingual learners' linguistic expertise, grows apace. Hamish Chalmers' talk describes research and practice driving this movement, and summarises the implications for linguistic proficiency, academic attainment and student wellbeing.



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## Constant Leung



# SECONDARY KEYNOTE

### **USING STUDENTS' OWN LANGUAGES: POLICY AND PRACTICE IN EAL CONTEXTS**

It is now widely recognised that EAL user-learners' own languages can play a productive part in teaching-learning activities in linguistically diverse classrooms. There is also growing awareness that promoting students' multilingualism is a desirable educational and social goal. In the first part of this keynote, Constant Leung will explore the different curriculum and policy options regarding multilingualism in schooling education. In the second part he will discuss different approaches to multilingual classroom practice that can promote learning in curriculum environments where students are from diverse language backgrounds. In the final part he will discuss the need for more systematic promotion of multilingual practices in professional teacher education. Constant's discussion will be informed by relevant research and professional experience in the UK and other world locations where the language of schooling is English.

Jen Dobson

**SPECIAL FEATURE:****Safeguarding children and teenagers online - a right, not an afterthought****Jen Dobson**

While use of the internet, digital tools and mobile learning has been steadily on the increase in ELT, I believe far too little importance has been placed on the safety of children and teenagers learning English online. The unprecedented situation of the Coronavirus pandemic has meant that many children and teenagers around the world have found themselves in online English language learning environments. There has been a serious lack of codes of conduct, good practice guides and staff training, in many cases. If robust systems had been in place before the global emergency, English language educators would have been able to adapt existing policies to the developing situation.

Unfortunately, despite the valiant efforts of teachers themselves, many schools and educational contexts have been seriously lacking with online child protection occurring too little, too late. As Britnell and Day (2020) maintain:

*'Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools have done a remarkable job of shifting their teaching and learning online. Unfortunately, this rapid transition has also increased and intensified a range of online safety risks for students, teachers and parents.'*

**Language learners' rights**

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) states in articles 12, 16, and 36 respectively, that children and teenagers have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them, the right to privacy and the right to be protected from exploitation. Article 17 states that adults should make sure the information that children and teenagers are getting is not harmful. Following the UN definition of 'a child' as anyone under 18, international best practice requires safeguarding policies and procedures are in place in the face to face (f2f) English classroom. I argue that child protection measures need to be also applied in an online English learning environment and/or when using online materials.



Image by Julia Mena Dobson

This could range from using an online video in the f2f English language classroom, showcasing a child's or teen's work on a school's social media channel, to online English learning programs.

## E-learning definitions

As opposed to the recent emergency remote teaching situation, online courses are planned programs which include one or both types of these interactions:

**Asynchronous:** when the learners and teacher are not present online at the same time, for example, a pre-recorded video has been uploaded to a shared platform.

**Synchronous:** when the learners and teacher are online at the same time, for example, via video conferencing tools.

**Blended learning** courses usually include either or both the above interactions with a f2f element.

## Understanding e-safety

As Venables, Bard, Taylor and Dobson (2020) assert, good practice starts with determining expectations of online behaviour and the potential safety issues and developing rules as protective safeguards. Our aim is to protect children and teenagers from any potentially harmful *content*, *contact* and *conduct*. Therefore, we need to consider how children and teenagers interact online and any related safety issues arising from such interactions. A key consideration being that just because a child or a teenager is 'tech savvy', this does not make them digitally wise. To put this into context, I will compare examples of good practice in the f2f classroom and identify ways that these can 'translate' to an online English learning environment.

## Online learning environments

Choosing an online learning space depends on the age of the learners, their language learning needs and the school or institution's hardware and software, as follows:

**Asynchronous learning** tools are available specifically for children and teenagers which enable them to access everything they need for the lessons, such as [Seesaw](#), [Class Dojo](#) and [Edmodo](#). These tools enable ease of uploading, storing and sharing. However, educators need to be aware the issues of data collection surrounding some educational platforms, for example, see the concerns expressed in the Children's Commissioner's Office (2018) report [Who knows what about me?](#)

**Synchronous learning** tools were not designed for children or teenagers. The fact that screenshots can be taken, or recordings made, could potentially put children and teenagers learning English at risk. It is also important to consider that most social networking sites have legal age restrictions and most video conferencing tools were originally designed for business conference calls. For example, see this information about the video conferencing app [Zoom](#)



Photo by Patricia Prudente on Upsplash

and tips for staying safe.

When using any tool for English learning with children or teenagers, ensure you enable the advanced safety settings. Furthermore:

- To protect learners from potentially harmful *contact*, add password protection to the virtual classroom, use the waiting rooms, lock the virtual room on entry, restrict renaming, insist on identification with full names and that web cams are enabled.
- To protect learners from potentially harmful *conduct*, such as cyber bullying, restrict screen share options, the changing of virtual backgrounds and disable recording features and times when the children could be unsupervised such as via private chat or break out rooms.
- All English language educators should also remain up to date with any safeguarding upgrades.



*Photo by Oluwakemi Solaja on Unsplash*

I additionally recommend these tips for safeguarding children and teenagers when teaching and learning English online:

### E-resources and materials

- Check that websites, tools and materials are age-appropriate and safe before English lessons.
- Use the educational versions of online tools.
- Watch all videos the whole way through before deciding to use them.

### Learners' personal information

- Do not collect telephone numbers or email addresses of minors.
- Use educational platforms, particularly those which generate codes.
- Whenever possible, use the school's / institution's account to communicate with children and teenagers rather than personal ones.

### Images of children and teenagers

Be aware of risks and implications of making, sharing and saving images of children and teenagers, even for educational purposes. Bearing in mind that:

- Posting children's and teenagers' images may reveal their specific locations.
- Images could be manipulated by others to bully a child or a teenager.
- It increases the risk of identity theft.
- It could lead to datafication through facial recognition technology.
- Children and teenagers also have rights regarding decisions as to what happens to their images.
- There are various creative alternatives, for example, see this blog post [Why you shouldn't post a child's face online](#) (Dobson, 2017).

Schools and institutions should also ask themselves when sharing images of minors, whether

publicity is being valued more than children's and teenagers' safety.

## E-safety policies and procedures

Just as in the f2f classroom, policies and procedures are also needed for online English learning. These should be shared with the whole teaching team, academic managers, parents / caregivers and the learners themselves.

- Guidelines such as [Keeping children safe online](#) from the child online protection group of the International Telecommunication Union can help inform policies.
- Developing and implementing an acceptable use policy provides protection for children and teenagers, the teaching staff and school / organisation and serves as a robust benchmark. This policy can then be added to for emergency remote teaching, for example.
- Legal disclaimers also add an extra layer of protection for schools / organisations.
- Codes of conduct give teachers and learners clarity on appropriate online behaviour for English lessons.
- Training sessions and support around e-safety should be provided for all stakeholders.
- There should be very clear directives about what to do and who to ask for advice in the case of concerns and/or safeguarding breaches.

## Codes of conduct for teachers

Codes of conduct for English language teachers of children and teenagers should include these areas:

- Maintain an educational atmosphere for live online English lessons by dressing as you would in the f2f classroom.
- Choose a neutral background such as in front of a wall or use a blurred background tool or learner-friendly image, if available.
- Avoid having anything on display in the background that unnecessarily discloses personal information.
- Adhere to all e-safety policies and procedures.
- Keep clear records of any incidents that occur and report them to the appropriate member of staff responsible for safeguarding.

## Codes of conduct for learners and families / care providers

Communicate with families and care providers to clearly share rationales behind safeguarding decisions (with sensitivity to the fact that online interactions may bring affluence differences to the forefront). Establish codes of conduct to ensure the educational environment is respected, including:

- Avoid having children and teenagers participate in online lessons in their bedrooms. Other rooms of the house where families have access and oversight are much safer options.
- Have the child or teenager keep the door open and check that an adult is always present.
- Ensure children and teenagers are dressed appropriately and do not have items in the background which unnecessarily disclose any personal information.
- Have learners identify themselves using their full names and ensure that they use their web cams.
- Establish procedures to prevent recording or taking screenshots of others and that online English lesson rules are followed.
- Talk to children and teenagers about e-safety issues. Ensure they are aware that they should

inform an adult if they feel uncomfortable with anything they experience online.

## Acceptable use policies

Here is an example [safety policy](#) from the United Kingdom's National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). To support the development of an *Acceptable Use Policy for Online Learning*, I suggest focusing on the areas outlined above. This is by no means an exhaustive list and will need to be updated as best safeguarding practice continues to be applied to English language teaching online.

## Teachers as e-safety role models

- Plan English lessons to explore online safety issues and teach digital literacies to raise children's and teenagers' awareness, see the following examples for [teenagers](#) [primary](#) and [teachers](#).
- Create engaging materials with English learners such as digital posters, flyers and web banners to highlight online safety.
- Re-evaluate your own online professional presence, privacy settings, passwords, social media profiles, and posts of personal photos and those of your family.
- Stay fully informed.

## In summary

For any English language educators who have yet to do so, the current emergency teaching situation is an opportunity to review current policies and get our e-safety 'houses in order'. We need to ensure we protect children's and teenagers' rights online *before* we start teaching them English, not after.

**Jen Dobson** has experience as an ELT teacher, writer, trainer, and IT coordinator with a special interest in safe, creative educational technology. She is currently a trainer on the *International House Certificate in Online Tutoring* and the Social Media and Technology Coordinator for IATEFL MaWSIG. She recently authored Oxford's latest pre-primary course for Spain, 'Archie's World'.

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If you're teaching children English online,  
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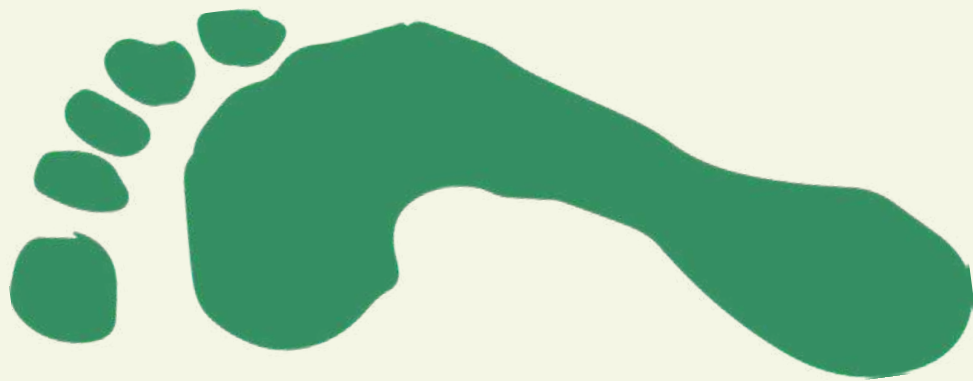


# PLAYBOOK FOR EMERGENCY REMOTE TEACHING TO 6-10 YEAR OLD LEARNERS

CLAIRE VENABLES  
ROSEMERE BARD  
JAMES M. TAYLOR  
JEN DOBSON

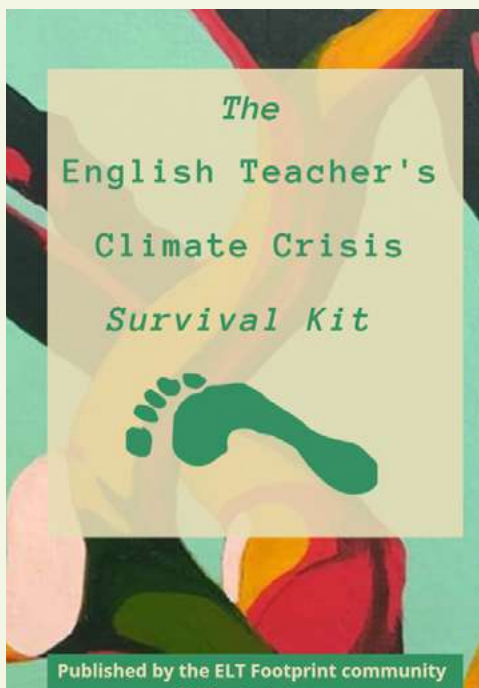
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# ELT Footprint

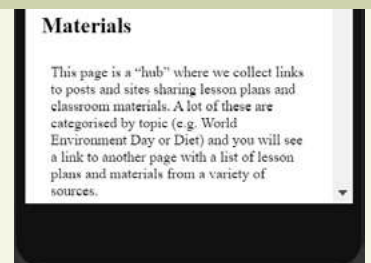


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Pulkit Vasudha



## SPOTLIGHT ON SUSTAINABILITY

Deepening conversations about sustainable development in primary and secondary language classrooms

**Pulkit Vasudha**

We increasingly find areas of sustainability and development included in primary and secondary language classrooms, both in published materials and from the endeavours of teachers. Many coursebooks introduce themes such as plastic waste and pollution and aim to encourage debate and provide project work on the subject, but does this go far enough?

In 2015, the United Nations set forth 17 [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (Figure 1) with the aim of transforming the world for the better by the year 2030. They now serve as the guiding light and target for governments, policymakers and educators the world over, but how does one talk to children and teenagers about weighty issues such as poverty, food security, gender inequality and economic stagnation, and that too in a second language? Davis (2008) points out that case studies of successful programs in the field would help teachers identify what works, why and how, the challenges to be overcome, and the inspiration to 'have a go', but there is still a paucity of readily available frameworks to teach sustainability.



What follows is an attempt at providing one such framework for developing language, awareness and critical engagement around sustainable development among young learners.

### The pilot

In 2017, I founded an education consultancy in India, and with a partner organisation, set out to find ways to bring these vast and ambitious challenges into language classrooms and to spark and deepen the conversations around sustainable development. The program we conceived had a dual aim: to help low-income students engage with civic issues and to train teachers in effective teaching practices.



We designed a bilingual curriculum to introduce students to the SDGs, to not only help develop linguistic competence but also a sense of agency to find local solutions to complex issues. We trained teachers in the curriculum, moving away from rote learning to student-centred, dialogue-driven classroom.

## Making Connections

A big challenge in any young learner lesson, but especially one that is centred on sustainable development, is how to engage the learners, how to sustain that engagement over a period to enable questioning and discussion, and how to nurture the engagement, and to transfer it beyond the classroom.

In the absence of age and context-appropriate graded stories to teach issues around the SDGs, with a little creativity teachers can effectively use prescribed coursebooks to make relevant connections. In the low-income community schools in which we piloted this program, teachers use a well-known folk tale about [Akbar and Birbal](#) to prompt discussions about poverty (SDG1), hunger (SDG 2) and reducing inequality (SDG 10). In another example, teachers use the story of [Laxmibai](#), a historical tale of a brave queen, to spur a dialogue about gender equality (SDG 5).



Figure 1 United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

A poster in the classroom (see Fig.1) is a visual aid to remind learners about the SDGs and how nearly every text they come across is, in some way, linked to one or more of the global goals. At the end of reading a text, teachers ask students which SDGs they can connect with these stories, and how they relate to their own lives. During the pilot, one of the issues students most related to was gender inequality – every student had a story of gender discrimination in their own families and societies.

The issues change in different contexts too. Children in a school near a polluted river were more likely to bring up clean water accessibility (SDG 6) and the effects on marine life (SDG 14). These discussions give teachers an opportunity to inject necessary language for students to express their concerns.

## Making it Real

Despite these successes, we found that teaching all 17 SDGs alongside the prescribed curriculum was too ambitious. After students made initial links to the SDGs, they still needed an opportunity to explore them further and understand them globally moving beyond their own contexts. In fact, the SDGs have been criticised for being no more than an 'ambitious vision' and 'a tenuous wish list' (Sengupta, 2018), so we have to be aware and wary of their abstraction and make tangible connections with the real world at every step.

Since student engagement with each SDG varied depending on the students' personal experience, we decided to encourage teachers to differentiate and give students the opportunity to pursue their own areas of interest. In groups, students begin to explore an SDG of their choice at a macro (binoculars) level and micro (microscope) level. Giving student choice is crucial to spur self-directed learning, and like all good projects, students got so involved and curious that they wanted to continue learning at home.

1. **Macro-level tasks:** Students use binoculars to look for numbers – with the help of the internet – relating to the SDG they have chosen to investigate. For example, how many people live in poverty in my city/state/country? How much do they earn every day? How much do they need to live?
2. **Micro-level tasks:** At the micro-level, using microscopes, students examine how the issues affect people in their own families and neighbourhoods. Students plan and ask questions to understand the real-life impact of the issues embedded within each SDG on (a) those who are affected by the problem, (b) those who take big or small steps to alleviate the problem in some way, and (c) those who aggravate the issue. Fig. 2 shows a sample questionnaire a student may write.

I want to know more about SDG 1: No Poverty

1. **Who suffers:** the homeless man who sleeps near my school
2. **Who helps:** the tea vendor gives him odd jobs to do
3. **Who makes the problem worse:** the shopkeepers in the area can give the homeless man a job but don't

Questions to ask:

1. The homeless man
  - a. What is your story?
  - b. What help do you need?
  - c. What jobs do you enjoy?
2. The tea vendor
  - a. Why do you help the homeless man?
  - b. How do you help him?
  - c. What is the man good at?
3. The shopkeepers
  - a. Can you give the homeless man a job?
  - b. Why or why not?
  - c. How can the man help you?

Figure 2 Sample interview questionnaire

Students plan and ask questions to understand the real-life impact of the issues embedded within each SDG on (a) those who are affected by the problem, (b) those who take big or small steps to alleviate the problem in some way, and (c) those who aggravate the issue. Fig. 2 shows a sample questionnaire a student may write.

Students then gather this information, either on a field trip with their teacher or during their free time as long as they are assisted by adults who can supervise. With all this information, students have both a bird's eye view and a close-up view of the problem. In the classroom, students can collate all they have learned in groups and present it in the form of a scrapbook, a poster, or a video.

## Bring Ideas to Life

Having gained a multidimensional perspective of their chosen SDGs, students now move on to problem-solving. Instead of simplistic solutions, we want to encourage students to use their creativity and dream like only children can. Here are some ways any language teacher, in any country and context can stimulate discussions on sustainability:

- ☑ **Picture that:** On large sheets of paper, students work in groups to draw pictures of how they would solve the problem of the SDG of their choice. Students explain their pictures – stick figures are welcome – as they go and the teacher supplies language where necessary.

- ☑ **Be a Superhero:** On large sheets of paper, students work in groups to don their favourite superhero powers and resolve the issues they have chosen to focus on.
- ☑ **Make a mess:** Students make a mind map of ideas to make the problem bigger. For example, for SDG1 (No Poverty), how can we make everyone poor? For SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), how can we pollute every water source? This reverse ideation is a powerful design thinking technique that topples conventional notions of what we know and forces students to view problems through an unconventional lens.

For ideation to be successful, give students at least 30 minutes for each thinking session to break out of the shackles of acceptable ideas and propose hitherto unknown solutions. The teachers' role is to 'keep alive the creative wisdom of the child' (Thorsteinsson, 2013), and create a non-judgmental space where all ideas – and especially the most out-of-the-box ones are welcome and celebrated.

At the end of the academic year, students bring one idea (to solve the problem) to life. In our pilot, students made posters about cleanliness and hygiene, wrote letters to the district head and wrote and performed a play about plastic pollution.

## Conclusion

This framework for sustainability education requires no extra materials development but only an investment of time and commitment to sustainability education in the language classroom.

**Step 1:** Teachers can connect SDGs to any texts they come across as part of their curriculum.

**Step 2:** Students choose an SDG they want to investigate further, in class or at home.

**Step 3:** After developing a deeper understanding through their own online research and interviews, students brainstorm ideas to solve the issues closest to their contexts.



Figure 3 Framework for bringing SDGs into the language classroom

Following this three-step process (Figure 3), teachers can develop a language of sustainability in their classrooms. In the pilot, we found a differentiated approach led to sustained engagement and self-directed learning. The deep, complex, cross-cultural approach is flexible to align with many curricula and leads to numerous opportunities for teaching emergent language.

**Pulkit Vasudha** is a teacher trainer with a deep interest in sustainability and technology in language teaching. She currently works as Academic Manager at Kaplan International College London, and is writing a series of children's books on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. She is also an ESL [blogger](#) and has edited coursebooks in the past.

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Ceri Jones, Christopher Graham,  
Katherine Bilsborough, Daniel Barber



## SPOTLIGHT ON SUSTAINABILITY

### Talking to... ELT Footprint

In this *Talking to...* interview, **Amanda Davies (AD)** talks to **Ceri Jones, Christopher Graham, Katherine Bilsborough** and **Daniel Barber** from ELT Footprint on ways to incorporate sustainability in ELT.

The interview took place during the Covid-19 Pandemic and includes suggestions for teachers teaching English in the face to face and virtual classroom.

**AD:** Can you please give us an overview of what ELT Footprint is, why you started it and your goals?

**ELT Footprint:** ELT Footprint is a response to an impending global environmental disaster and the threat it presents to our survival and to the living planet. We can all address climate breakdown, species loss and overconsumption on a personal level, as well as at the level of politics and protest, but we think that we can most effectively make change happen at the level of our own profession, within the companies and institutions, schools and classrooms where we teach English.

ELT Footprint was launched in May 2019 to coincide with a global climate emergency strike called by [Fridays for Future](#). It has quickly become a shared space for people across the ELT world to share projects, ideas and initiatives, and a hub where people can look for help and inspiration, get together to take action and celebrate victories as we all explore ways to lower our ELT footprint. We want to work in partnership with everyone in ELT, from the largest stakeholder institutions to the youngest children to create a more

sustainable and planet-friendly ELT world. That's because we realise that to build a vision of a better future we need to stand and work together; this won't work if we leave people behind.

Most discussion and sharing happens on social media – [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#) – but you can also follow us on our [blog and website](#). This is where you'll find a host of interesting lesson materials and useful links and resources.

**AD:** What advice would you give to teachers who want to make their YL ELT teaching practice more environmentally friendly?

**ELT Footprint:** As with any advice for teachers, this very much depends on context but there are some generalities too. In most cases it isn't necessary to make big changes to your practice as even small changes will have a big impact. Here are a few ideas which can be tweaked depending on age and level:

- Involve your students in the greening process by asking them for ideas of how to make the classroom and lessons more environmentally friendly. Children and teenagers usually come up with creative suggestions that you could try. You could have a *Green suggestions* box or poster where students can add new ideas as they think of them.

- Consider trialling things like *no-tech day* or *no-materials day* either once a week or once a month.
- Reuse and repurpose materials, either with the same class or with different groups. This has pedagogical advantages too as recycling language is key to learning.
- When thinking about aims and objectives for a lesson plan, add in a *green objective*. Even thinking about the issue makes a difference – before long it will become automatic and you'll start considering ways of reducing the carbon footprint of your lessons.
- Talk to other teachers about making your lessons greener. Helping to raise awareness is key.

**AD:** How can teachers avoid children and teenagers feeling overwhelmed and depressed by the climate emergency?

**ELT Footprint:** Eco-anxiety is a phenomenon that we, as teachers, need to be aware of, and while we believe that awareness-raising is important and necessary, we want lessons to be full of hope and positivity. The key to this is to talk not only about problems, but also about solutions. We can focus on positive action being taken by individuals and organisations and by telling and sharing stories of success. For example our [Eco Heroes](#) page offers a list of stories to explore focusing on individuals bringing about change in their own context. Teachers or students can choose a story to explore and present to the class, or they can look for eco heroes in their own local context.

It's also important to focus on action that the students can take and changes they can affect. For example, a project that could be conducted at home, is to ask students to carry out a survey about their use of water, initially just chronicling their various uses of water, and then looking at how they might

cut back, or reuse water, by watering plants for example. This could be coupled with raising awareness about water shortages, the consequences of water shortages and organisations that are making positive changes such as [water.org](http://water.org). The same could be done on the topic of transport. Students could look back on their habits before lockdown, how their habits have changed during lockdown, the effects on air quality around the world and the lessons we might learn as we come out of lockdown. In each case, we bring together awareness-raising, information gathering and direct action within the students' local context.

**AD:** Materials on the environment often include topics such as extreme weather, eco-tourism or endangered animals, but do not really empower students to act. Can you share some concrete climate solutions that can be incorporated into lessons to empower children and teenagers and focus on the positives?

**ELT Footprint:** As well as the ideas we already mentioned, teachers can try the following:

- Start a recycling station in the classroom.
- Conduct a plastic survey, asking students to make a note of all the one-use plastic they use in their household during a week. You could also encourage them to look at all the different kinds of plastic and find out which can be recycled and which can't, and why.
- Similarly, conduct an energy survey, with students logging their use of various electrical appliances and finding out how much energy they use, with the aim of drawing up some kind of pledge, or tip sheet for reducing their personal energy consumption, such as remembering to switch off their computer/TV overnight or turning lights out when leaving a room.

- If the school has an outside space, even a small balcony, you could cultivate a class garden and teach children about how to grow their own food and the importance of plants, especially flowering plants, in protecting ecosystems

**AD:** What can practitioners who regularly attend international conferences but are concerned about their environmental impact do to make a difference?

**ELT Footprint:** Conferences have become an entrenched element of the ELT community. We all seem to enjoy them as well as benefiting professionally from them. The international conferences do of course have a significant environmental impact and it's right for teachers to be concerned. Working with organisers on 'greening' events is one step. A more significant one is the development of local conferences with overseas speakers attending only online. The Covid-19 episode has dropped us quickly into an all-online future, and perhaps that should be an attainable goal for all conference-goers. Importantly, online events can be locally-driven yet still international in outlook.

**AD:** To what extent should the climate emergency be incorporated into teacher education courses?

**ELT Footprint:** One of the tenets of ELT Footprint is to get environmental issues into the sinews of our community. This can mean working with teachers, ministries of education, writers and publishers to discuss how these issues can be interwoven with the ELT content delivered to children and teenagers in schools. The reinforcing of this comes from teacher education; both initial training and ongoing development. Motivation and engagement in class is a perennial area of concern to teachers in continued professional development programmes around the world, and environmental topics can be effective triggers,

especially for children and teenagers.

**AD:** How can YL teachers get involved in the work of ELT Footprint?

**ELT Footprint:** We are a community which is composed predominantly of teachers. As such, we welcome teachers to get involved in any way they wish and in ways we might not yet have even considered. While we have moderators and administrators for the various platforms, the community belongs to everyone. Teachers can share links, resources, ideas and information about projects or plans. They can ask questions - or answer questions that other teachers have asked. They can reach out for advice or to get something off their chest. The more interaction, the better.

We love hearing from teachers in all corners of the world. That way we can learn about key environmental issues that affect them and their students. If you are reading this and think you'd like to write a guest blog post or use the group to do some crowd-sourcing for a project you are working on, reach out! We're waiting to hear from you.

**AD:** How can English teachers engage parents / caregivers in environmental education?

**ELT Footprint:** Support from home relies perhaps above all on parents or carers feeling that the content they are being asked to support has a sense of relevance to them, and to their perception of the learning needs of their children. Local environmental content can fit this profile with topics such as green spaces around the school or how to make walking to school a safer option, for example. There are family-friendly [carbon footprint calculators available online](#) that can be used at home with students reporting the results in class, leading perhaps to poster presentations or discussions about how to improve collective carbon consumption.

**Ceri Jones** is a teacher, trainer and materials writer who has worked many coursebook projects for secondary learners. She is currently interested in exploring ways to approach environmental issues with teachers in a range of contexts.

**Christopher Graham** has worked in ELT in over 30 countries. Recently he has worked with the British Council Iraq on Train the Trainer programmes, developed a Train the Trainer course for Libyan EFL teachers, and written lower secondary EFL materials for low-resource schools with the British Council Sierra Leone.

**Katherine Bilsborough** is an ELT author. She has published books and online courses and writes lesson plans for the British Council's *Teaching English* website and NGL's *In focus* blog. Katherine is on the committee of IATEFL's MaWSIG and is the author of ELT T2W's *How to write primary materials*.

**Daniel Barber** is a teacher, trainer and writer based in Cádiz, Spain. He has taught learners of all ages for 25 years, in Mexico, the UK and Spain. He writes for several publishers and co-wrote *From English Teacher to Learner Coach*.

#### Useful resources

<https://eltsustainable.com/> A site dedicated to mainstreaming environmental awareness and action in language teaching.

<https://worldslargestlesson.globalgoals.org/> A wealth of materials linked to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

<https://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/video-zone/plastic-ocean-campaigner> A lesson about a 12-year-old anti-plastics campaigner.

<https://www.ecoschools.global/> A site showcasing cross curricular whole school projects for primary schools.

<https://www.greenpeace.org/international/campaign/tools-for-teachers/> A site by Greenpeace including tools for teachers.

<https://eltfootprint.org/teacher-training-and-its-elt-footprint/> A blog by Nicola Meldrum on embedding environmental concerns into ELT activities.

<https://eltfootprint.org/the-recycling-quiz/> A blog by Anita Demitroff on recycling projects.

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Clyde Fowle



## SPOTLIGHT ON SUSTAINABILITY

Weaving sustainability into the primary ELT curriculum

**Clyde Fowle**

An often cited 1987 United Nations (UN) report defines sustainability as, 'Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. In 2015, the UN also launched the *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* to guide global efforts toward achieving sustainability by 2030.

Via the SDGs, the UN recognises the crucial role young people play in achieving these global goals and therefore, has additionally set specific goals for education. For example, this definition of education for sustainability in the Australian Curriculum (n.d.) reflects an educational focus on the SDGs and is therefore particularly useful:

Education for sustainability develops the knowledge, skills, values and world-views necessary for people to act in ways that contribute to more sustainable patterns of living. It enables individuals and communities to reflect on ways of interpreting and engaging with the world. Sustainability education is futures-oriented, focusing on protecting environments and creating a more ecologically and socially just world through informed action.

Throughout this article, I will be focusing specifically on aspects of environmental sustainability.

### Global educational responses

The actions of the UN and increasing global awareness of the climate crisis, inspired by young climate activists such as Greta Thunberg, have collectively led to a call for sustainability to be incorporated into the curriculum. A Study International report (2019) highlights that 86 percent of teachers and 80 percent of parents in the United States support the teaching of climate change, although over half of the teachers admitted to not including the topic in lessons. Many young people have argued that education should encompass environmental concerns, as Thunberg (2019, p.7) pointedly asks, 'What is the point of learning facts within the school system when the most important facts given by the same science of the same school system clearly mean nothing to politicians and our society?'

In mainstream education, this is starting to increasingly take place across the curriculum as the UNESCO Climate Change Initiative (2010, p.7) states, 'The recommended course of action ... is to integrate Climate Change Education for Sustainable Development in a transdisciplinary

manner into subject areas such as science, citizenship education, geography, human rights education and language courses.’ Furthermore, Barr, Cross and Dunbar (2014) have highlighted how schools who are achieving the top awards for sustainability weave it into their existing curriculum, rather than positioning environmental awareness as an optional extra or add-on.

Many countries are finally responding to this challenge with Italy making the headlines in 2019 as the first country to mandate an hour per week of climate change education, linked to the SDGs and integrated across the curriculum. In the freely downloadable publication focused on integrating the SDGs in an ELT context specifically, Maley and Peachy (2017, p.7) highlight how, ‘...a growing number of ELT professionals have come to believe that language teachers are more than just teachers of language. Through what they teach and their attitudes and practices they have an enduring influence on the future attitudes of their students.’ I would further maintain that this is particularly the case for the primary English language teaching context.

### **Making sustainability more than an ‘add-on’**

Guided by the previously mentioned cross-curricular approach in mainstream education, I believe in embedding sustainability into topics across the primary ELT curriculum, rather than teaching token ‘environment’ units which has been the general response in primary ELT to date. By linking an environmental dimension to various topics in the English language curriculum, children can better understand its importance and see links between sustainability and particular aspects of their lives. How this is done depends on children’s general level of environmental awareness, for example, a teacher could start by looking at ways that the SDGs may link to the existing curriculum and then build on this accordingly.

In my teaching experience with primary English language learners in the East Asia region, this works best if children are initially introduced to the concept of sustainability and understand the importance of concepts such as ‘Reduce’, ‘Reuse’ and ‘Recycle’. Therefore, a valuable point of entry is to start with some standalone lessons to introduce these core environmental concepts and the related lexis. Once children understand what sustainability is and its importance to them and the wider world, teachers can highlight links in various topics and not just limit it to a token ‘environment’ unit of study.

Practical examples I have tried in the classroom include asking children to monitor their water consumption when looking at daily routines. They keep a water diary over a week and look at ways of reducing their consumption of water. *Meat Free Mondays* can be introduced when looking at food and diet, and children can design dream ‘eco-homes’ when studying houses around the world for intercultural learning (figure 1). There are many useful connections that can be made, as children become more familiar with issues of sustainability, they will also gradually make such links themselves.



Figure 1: A primary English learner's eco-home design

## Avoiding children getting upset about environmental issues

With primary English learners, it is crucial to focus on things that they can take action about so that they feel empowered. For example, when focusing on the 3Rs, I enable children to create classroom signs, such as “Remember to turn off the lights”, “Keep the A/C on 25 degrees” etc. This can lead to discussion about the use of plastic bags and straws, and the fact that it’s often up to us to say ‘no’ to these things. With a multilingual group of children at an international school in Thailand, we started by learning how to say no to plastic bags in Thai using a [Trash Heroes video](#) and then each language group taught the rest of the class how to say no to plastic bags in their own language. This was a really enjoyable and inclusive activity that emphasised the global nature of environmental issues. Children learning English are often aware of issues such as air pollution and are happy to learn how to be more proactive, for example by using [AirVisual](#) to check AQI levels and learning about steps they can take to protect themselves.

Connecting children with nature is another excellent way to help them make positive connections between themselves and the natural world, as well as to other aspects of the curriculum. Grosch (2020) offers a plethora of practical ideas for how to do this in primary English learning in her recent IATEFL YLTSIG blog post [No reason to stay inside](#). Enabling children to get involved in community service projects such as local recycling initiatives or starting a school garden takes civic action to a whole new level. For example, I was lucky to be able to take my English classes to the school’s organic farm and also arrange various field trips, such as to a local honey producer, which had links to themes in the children’s science and sustainability curriculum.

## Involving parents and caregivers

In my own teaching experience, children tend to do this themselves. For example, they sometimes put pressure on families to recycle or say no to plastic bags. As teachers we can think of various ways to include parents / caregivers and extend what we do beyond the classroom, when we grew pumpkins in class at Halloween, I gave all my learners some pumpkin seeds to take home, which many planted with their families. This gave them a talking point every week, telling me how many leaves their pumpkin had. Most of the parents / caregivers also enjoyed this home-school link.

## Positive impact

An inspiring example of impact was when one of my Thai learners on a school field trip to a botanic garden said, "You teach us about sustainability, but why is everything in our packed lunches wrapped in plastic?" He had a real point and I had previously questioned this. I asked if I could take a video of him saying this with the large pile of plastic rubbish and send it to the head of school, which he agreed to. His action led to changes in how hundreds of school lunches were packaged after this. Teaching learners about sustainability really can make a difference. And for me, helping give the children in our classes a voice is what primary English teaching is all about.

## Top tips

In summary, here are my top ten tips for weaving sustainability into the primary English curriculum:

1. Be a role model of sustainability to your learners.
2. Integrate aspects of sustainability across the topics in your curriculum.
3. Focus on positive actions that learners can take to make a difference.
4. With your learners, look of ways to 'green' your school.
5. Encourage learners to be creative in finding solutions to local challenges.
6. Take a project-based approach to sustainability topics.
7. Explore ways to incorporate hands on learning outside the classroom.
8. Encourage learners to voice their concerns about issues related to sustainability.
9. Work across the curriculum with other subject teachers in your school.
10. Join an online community of likeminded teachers such as 2020 ELTons *Innovation in Teacher Resources* finalist, [ELT Footprint](#). Read more on pages 30 – 33 of this publication.

**Clyde Fowle** is a freelance ELT author and teacher trainer based in Thailand. He was previously the Director of the Intensive English Programme at Prem International School in Chiang Mai, Thailand. He was an animal activist in his youth and has been a vegetarian since he was 15 years old. You can also watch a recording of Clyde giving a [Q&A session on the topic of sustainability](#) from the IATEFL YLTSIG 2019 Web Conference.

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Owain Llewellyn

**SPOTLIGHT ON SUSTAINABILITY**

Addressing the climate emergency in secondary ELT

**Owain Llewellyn**

### Why bring the climate emergency into the secondary classroom?

We are living through an environmental and climate emergency which is undoubtedly going to affect our secondary students in the future, if not already. Many teachers are now looking for ways to bring the environment into the secondary classroom, and some major steps have already been taken. In 2019, Daniel Barber declared [a climate emergency](#) on behalf of ELT, aligning us with countries such as the Republic of Ireland and cities from Milan to New York. This adds the voices of ELT professionals and their students to the voices of the millions who have already taken part in the [#FridaysForFuture](#) strikes.

The secondary students we teach may feel powerless in the face of a climate emergency, but it's these young people who will bear the brunt of the climate emergency. In order for them to be able to act positively, it is vital that teachers introduce environmental issues in a balanced and discerning way, and ensure that sustainability is not only dealt with in terms of the natural world, but also in terms of the emotional and mental well-being of their secondary students. As language teachers, we are uniquely placed for making a difference. Every day, we work to develop relationships with students around the world and aim to engage them in dialogues about things that are relevant and matter to them. Ecological literacy is vital for our secondary learners, and in this article I will show how we can embed a dialogue about our world into every lesson we teach, bringing the environment to the heart of language learning through practical, engaging tasks that empower our students and give them hope.

### What are the challenges when addressing climate change with teenagers?

In my first language I can speak passionately, persuasively, informatively and engagingly on the topic of environmental issues, however, trying to do this in a foreign language is a different story. I believe it is difficult for four main reasons:

## 1. Linguistically demanding language

Some of the vocabulary we use to talk about environmental issues can be linguistically demanding. Whilst we understand the meaning, it can be challenging even in one's first language to fully define terms such as 'climate change' or 'climate emergency'. Furthermore, this terminology is evolving all the time making it challenging to know what the accepted terms are. ELT Footprint are collating a glossary of terms that can be used with secondary learners. What's more, teachers who feel unprepared to teach environmental issues should bear in mind that their role is not to impart knowledge, but to facilitate an atmosphere where students can work together to construct their own knowledge on the issues.

## 2. Abstract thinking

The topic requires abstraction, in that it is easier to describe a flood in your local area or explain a new green initiative taking place in your school than to synthesize this information with longer-term global changes in climate and the human participation in this. Therefore, personalisation and localisation are key, as is ensuring students approach the emergency in terms of what they personally can do understanding that they can't solve all the world's problems on their own.

## 3. Communicative purpose

Talking about the climate emergency can be demanding because it often involves complex information and requires the use of higher order thinking skills. For example when talking about a flood in the local area, students need to be able to examine if there is a link to climate change or not. Interactions about the environment often require the speaker to be persuasive, in particular if they need to defend a position or suggest ways of mitigating the effects of our actions on our planet. When we ask students to talk about the environment, we need to carefully scaffold tasks and provide students with the language and skills necessary to succeed. A great resource for this is the [#TalkingClimate Handbook](#).

## 4. Affective factors

Students and teachers can feel uncomfortable around the topic, often due to a feeling of helplessness about how to make a difference, or general aversion to the doom and gloom nature of the topic. Therefore, when we bring serious issues such as the climate crisis into the classroom, we need to also ensure we equip our secondary learners with the thinking skills necessary to process this information. Students need to be able to discern fact from fake news, recognise reliable sources of information and reflect on their own contribution to the climate emergency as opposed to those of heavy industries and big corporations. Only through fully understanding the situation can they make a difference.

## Embedding green awareness in secondary ELT

A recent topic I introduced to my secondary learners was childhood and upbringing. Here are some ways I engaged my students in discussion about the environment.

A website I regularly use when looking for copyright free images is [climatevisuals.org](https://climatevisuals.org) Figure 1 shows the image I chose. I wanted to keep the lesson focused on the positives, in this case cycling as one solution to help mitigate the climate crisis, as well as empower my students rather than make them feel guilty or hopeless.

I displayed the images and asked the following discussion questions:

1. What can you see in this picture?
2. Where are the people going?
3. How are they feeling?
4. When was the last time that you did something like this?
5. Did you cycle more as a young child or now?
6. Is it possible to go cycling like this where you live? Why/Why not?
7. To what extent can the world's problems be solved by people travelling in this way?



Figure 1. Photo by Marc van Woudenberg

Teenagers can sometimes be reticent to talk, however, offering fresh perspectives and personalising topics goes a long way in terms of getting students to talk. Since the topic of the lesson was childhood, the last thing the students were expecting was a discussion about the environment, so when I introduced this angle it immediately grabbed their attention and got them thinking. Rather than be overwhelmed by a whole unit on saving the planet, students had a lively discussion which raised awareness and opened up a dialogue that we could revisit in future lessons.

Discussion tasks are ideal for including a green focus, but what about other lesson stages? One of the language points in the unit on childhood was *used to*, with a final communicative task of describing how students' lives used to be different. I always endeavour to give my students as many choices as possible, so I decided to give the option to talk about their personal lives, their home town or their country, describing how things used to be different. Once students had described the differences in groups, I asked them to reflect on which of these differences were positive, and which were negative. It didn't matter that not all of the statements were about the climate crisis, but the ones that did relate to the environment prompted discussion and practice in a safe and supportive atmosphere.

Consider the following topics and examples of environmental literacy that can be embedded into the following topics:

#### Topic: Food

Environmental literacy: What impact does my diet have on the planet?  
How can I reduce it?

#### Topic: Role models

Environmental literacy: Which well-known role models do something to mitigate the climate emergency?

**Topic: Festivals**

Environmental literacy: How can we enjoy festivals such as New Year's Eve or Diwali whilst reducing their often huge environmental impact in terms of plastic waste or pollution they produce?

**Topic: Making comparisons**

Environmental literacy: How has the countryside near my home changed over the last 5, 10 and 50 years?

**Topic: Making suggestions**

Environmental literacy: What could we try that has not been done in the fight against climate change?

**Summary**

As the climate crisis deepens, it is imperative that we bring environmental issues into the classroom, not just once a term, but to embed them regularly into lessons throughout the semester. However, we need to do this with sensitivity so as not to overburden students but rather look for ways we can make climate activism achievable and relevant for our students.

**Owain Llewellyn** is a passionate environmentalist and language teaching professional who has worked as a teacher trainer and academic manager on three continents. He publishes [eltsustainable.com](http://eltsustainable.com) and runs the online course [Language Teaching for the Planet](#)

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Valéria França



## Early Years

Magical learning moments: using puppets with early years children  
**Valéria França**

Puppets are an excellent resource for fostering magical English language learning with early years children. This article will explore the benefits of puppets as well as share practical ideas for the classroom.

### How do puppets relate to YL ELT?

A puppet is an inanimate object which when brought to life enables new worlds and narratives to be created. According to Mcdermott and Crouch (2000), puppeteers are required to create an environment where both players and audience can dream and conspire together, agreeing that the inanimate object, the puppet, has become real. This 'conspiracy' is, in my view, very much the same sort of 'magic' teachers need to create in the early years classroom to enable learning to take place. There has to be a willingness to suspend belief and bridge the gap between the real and make-believe and the known and unknown.



What's more, as the puppeteer Rene Baker (2013, p. 108) notes, 'The puppet is empty until filled with the puppeteer's expression. Positioned between the player and the audience, the puppet is a *go between*, translating the human's thoughts and feelings into movement, image and text; in essence, the puppet is a medium and *mediator*.' In early years English language learning, a teacher is also essentially a mediator, a go between, bringing together two different worlds: the world of children's first languages and the world of the English language. Therefore, puppets are an ideal support for this mediation process in the classroom.

### How do puppets support children's cognitive and affective development?

Piaget's stages, despite significant criticism, remain important for educators when viewed as a flexible framework for children's cognitive development. In Piaget's preoperational stage (children aged between 2 to 6), a child is still very self-centred, fantasy plays an important part in their lives and they find it difficult to classify objects or talk about abstract or formal properties, such as colour and shape. Language learning at this age relies on repetition, physical response, movement and song. The use of a puppet in the early years classroom

enables children to swiftly change from the real world to the fantasy world enabling alternative types of learning exchanges to take place.

Even older children benefit greatly from using puppets in the English classroom. It is a misconception that children who have clearly entered a concrete operational stage (aged 6 to 12) as described by Piaget, are no longer positively affected by puppets. Children at this stage are still making a transition into more abstract reasoning and logical thought. Although they are less dependent on the manipulation of objects and the physical experience to hypothesise, each child experiences this transition at their own pace. The same applies to language learning and the formalisation of language symbols, both in their first languages and in English. A puppet used during this phase can be a very useful learning mediator.



A puppet can take on the role of a *novice*, who the children can talk and explain things to or it can assume the role of an *expert* who teaches the children things. The puppet can help bridge gaps in much the same way as a teacher scaffolds learning opportunities to enable learners to work within their Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD), as conceived by Vygotsky.

Puppets have the additional advantage for teachers in that they can reduce the level of anxiety and stress which a child may experience when learning English. A safe and comfortable learning environment is fundamental for children's psychological and emotional growth, and allows them to engage fully in the world of creativity, fantasy and imagination. Therefore puppets are ideal to enable interaction with the English language.

### What types of puppets can we use?

We can bring many types of puppets into the early years English classroom:

- Hand or glove puppets: these can be made of paper bags, socks, felt or even a more sophisticated furry puppet. They may move their mouths and sometimes hands, so you can make gestures as well.
- Finger puppets: these are quite small and are ideal for pair work and mini group work where children use puppets to tell stories and act things out.
- A cuddly toy: these have arms and legs which bring an extra dimension. You need to manipulate the toy's head and their arms and hands, but this also means that any toy could become the class puppet or mascot.

### How can we breathe life into a classroom puppet?

Puppeteers often talk about breathing life into a puppet so that the audience believes in it. Here are some suggestions to achieve this:

- ☑ Whatever puppet you use (a glove puppet, finger puppet, cuddly toy, sock puppet, paper-bag puppet), get to know it. Look at it, feel how it moves, understand its personality, look at how it looks at you.

- ✓ Practise holding your puppet. Ask yourself: how does it walk, talk and listen to you? How does it move its head? (Try to use a surface to manipulate your puppet which can be a table top or even your own arm),
- ✓ Think how you are going to introduce the puppet to the learners. Think how it is going to enter and leave activities such as circle time. Remember, it has to leave a dignified manner, don't just stuff it into a drawer! It's a living object now, so make sure it 'lives'. Think how and why it will re-appear in subsequent lessons.

### How can we prepare children for a puppet in lessons?

Just as teachers need to prepare themselves for using the puppet, we need to prepare the children too. Try these tips, and [watch this video on how to introduce a puppet for the first time](#).

- ✓ Give the children time to enter the realm of make-believe. Ask, 'Do you want to meet a new friend?'
- ✓ Ensure the learners are looking at you and the puppet. Control this through your tone of voice and actions.
- ✓ Establish from the start that the puppet doesn't speak the learners' languages and only speaks English.
- ✓ Address the puppet and make sure it responds to you. It does not have to speak, but it understands everything that is said in English in the classroom. The puppet can whisper in your ear and you can mediate the interaction. Children accept this quite naturally and are willing to speak to the puppet.
- ✓ Make sure the puppet has a history and context. The puppet might show the children photos of trips and home life.

### Summary

Using puppets in early years ELT can bring new challenges for teachers. We need to prepare for an extra 'colleague' in the classroom. We need to be less self-conscious when using a puppet and more flexible and ready for whatever learning opportunities may arise. However, using puppets helps make the learning experience far more memorable and meaningful for children and this in itself is a powerful reason for bringing them into the English language classroom.

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Delia Kidd



# PRIMARY

What really interests children? Unique data from primary students' stories

**Delia Kidd**

In 2018 I was involved in a competition run by Cambridge University Press ELT which asked primary children around the world to submit stories to win prizes, including having their story published in a short anthology. The competition was simple: write a story, illustrate it, and send it in.

The response was overwhelming. With over 7,000 stories from 50 countries and 1,400 different schools, we had the gruelling task of choosing the winners. Twelve children were selected and their stories were published [online](#).

The competition provided us with a large database of primary children's writing, which we decided to analyse, considering the stories from two key points of view:

- 1. Linguistic features:** Having a large database of written text will allow us to conduct analysis on the types of language children use to write stories. We are able to look into various different aspects of language, such as the type of adjectives children use, what they pair these with (collocations) and what common phrases they're including. And as these learners are mostly speakers of other languages, we can get an insight into the types of mistakes they make when writing in English.
- 2. Learner characteristics:** Our hypothesis was that, since this task was completely open, learners were likely to write about topics that interest them. They could also be writing stories they're familiar with from school, home or elsewhere. Thus, by analysing the topics and themes of the stories, we might be able to gain insights into what motivates and interests primary learners. We can do this from two perspectives: what themes are universally interesting and motivating, and what topics are more/less interesting to primary aged groups of children from different countries?

Our work is ongoing, and we are currently on the phase of transcribing and analysing the stories. Most of the stories were handwritten, and first we needed to key them into digital format in order to use corpus software for linguistic analysis. We currently have around 500,000 words transcribed and 2,500 stories analysed. We still have a way to go, but in this article I will share some of the insights we have gained so far from the analysis.

We compiled metadata about each story as they were transcribed. This included the following information about each contributor:

- Age
- First language
- Country of origin
- Information about the story features:
  - Characters
- Ending
- Plot
- Themes
- Genre\*
- Location\*

\*We have yet to analyse the story genres or locations in which stories are set, and so commentary on these is not included in this article.

### Age

The vast majority of entries have been from upper primary students aged between 9 and 12. This is perhaps expected given it is at this age that school children are engaging in more extensive writing. However, surprisingly we had a number of entries from children as young as three years old. This indicates that there was, to some extent, teacher and/or parent/caregiver influence in the writing of some of these stories. While we might believe that many of the ideas came from the children themselves, we need to assume that teachers/parents/caregivers participated in the physical writing of the story. This means we can still consider the story based on aspects such as theme, characters and location to understand the interests and motivations of the child, but we can't use it to understand linguistic choices or errors that the writer might have made without an adult's involvement.

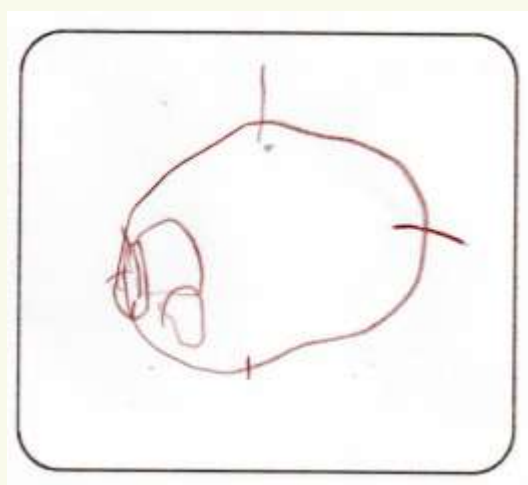


Figure 1. The story of a toothless shark who tries to eat some fish being protected by a crab. Maria, 3, Brazil.

### First language and country of origin

From our dataset so far, the top five first languages include Russian, Ukrainian, Greek, Brazilian Portuguese and Hindi. This information was initially requested for us to be able to understand language features and errors used by learners with different first languages. However, since realising that this information may not be reliable we have decided to focus more on the country the stories came from. This allows us to consider the cultural aspects that might influence the story writing, for example are the stories based on topics or fables popular in that country? As an example, we noticed that several stories from Turkish children included topics related to food – perhaps indicating the importance of food and meals in Turkish culture.



Figure 2. This story gives an account of the writer's family tradition of picking mushrooms. Alla, 9, Ukraine.



We have identified close to 150 themes that feature in these children's stories, which is testament to the wide variety of topics they write about. These are invaluable for seeing the originality of thought, as well as the topics that children are interested in and want to communicate. The most common theme is that of friendship – indicating the importance of friends and building relationships during childhood. Other themes such as helping others, discovery, and family are also common, showing important values children have. However, the third most common theme is fear, and there are some other tough themes such as good vs. evil and even death occurring quite frequently. This perhaps shows us that there is a desire from students to talk about these topics, and that we as practitioners need not shy away from them.

## Implications of the research

There is a lot of information we can get from these stories, but how might it affect the way we teach primary learners or produce materials for them? We have identified three key areas:

### 1. It can help us to make better choices

By understanding what our primary learners are interested in through the topics they are writing about, we are able to make more informed choices regarding the type of material or topics we select for our classes. This in turn should lead to greater engagement and motivation from our learners.

### 2. It can help us get to know our students better

We have a rare opportunity here to see what our learners are thinking and writing about on a large scale. And not just in our own context, but learners across the globe. What things do they have in common? What makes them different? We can use this to connect with our learners, and help them to connect with each other.

### 3. It can help us to create better learning experiences

Getting primary students to write, speak, or produce language based on what they're interested in, what inspires them and what gets their creative juices flowing will create a more meaningful learning experience for them, and one that will result in better understanding of concepts and hopefully a love for learning.

What really comes through in these stories is how wonderfully imaginative and creative children can be. We should be careful not to underestimate their originality, and work hard to create environments in which their creativity can thrive and be nurtured.

**Delia Kidd** is a Senior Research Manager at Cambridge University Press. She manages research projects relating to primary education in ELT. She has a background in editorial, as well as several years as a primary and EFL teacher in multiple countries including South Africa, South Korea, and Italy.

Sarah M. Howell



# PRIMARY

Lapbooking – a creative learning tool in the inclusive classroom

**Sarah M. Howell**

Lapbooks are exciting, learn-by-doing tools that enable teachers to implement a child-centred approach which takes into account the diversity and uniqueness of all learners. In this article, we shall look at the principles behind lapbooking and how they can be used to make all primary classrooms inclusive learning environments for every child.

## What is a lapbook?

A lapbook is a book to use on your lap which is dedicated to a particular theme or topic. They generally consist of a folder that contains a variety of mini-booklets, foldables and other materials which link to the larger topic that the lapbook covers. In that sense, they become a kind of 3D mind map where children can explore concepts and engage creatively with the things they are studying.

Lapbooks can be used with a range of levels and age groups and to meet diverse needs. Text is often involved, but lapbooks can also contain only pictures for children who are not yet reading or writing. They are created by students, usually with the support and guidance of their teacher.

Completed lapbooks can be used for storing and recalling information, presenting work and can be used as part of formative or summative assessment. Some possible topics include:

- the unit topic
- a language point
- a picturebook or graded reader
- a CLIL topic
- local, national or international festivals
- values such as kindness or sharing
- school or daily routines

## Why use lapbooks?

There are a number of reasons which make lapbooks ideal for the primary classroom. These include:

**Inclusive learning:** Lapbooks are extremely inclusive as all children can work, learn and study at their own pace and their own level of readiness. They promote cooperative learning as well as fairness and allow all students to express their ideas with confidence.

**21<sup>st</sup> century skills:** Lapbooks develop essential key competences for thinking more deeply and critically about content, for expressing creativity, for collaborating with peers and for communicating ideas with confidence. When creating their lapbooks, children develop a variety of skills such as planning and organising, sequencing, narration, summarising and fine motor skills.

**Visible thinking and learning:** Lapbooks enable children to make their thinking and learning visible. It gives structure and direction to their inner learning and helps them to share these processes with peers and teachers. In turn, teachers are more able to engage with the processes students are going through as they learn, and have more opportunities to assess learning formatively.

**Hands-on learning:** Primary students respond well to hands-on, interactive learning where they can ask themselves questions and work things out for themselves. As children work on their lapbooks, the teacher assumes the role of facilitator who helps and guides students to become more active participants in the learning process.

**Memorable lessons:** Lap books are typically colourful with plenty of images. This aids memory, enhances the learning experience and helps make content memorable for children.

**Chunks of content:** Finished lapbooks have various sections, each one including bite-sized chunks of information on the topic which is easily digestible for young children.

## Using lapbooks with primary learners

### Planning

When introducing lapbooks for the first time a more structured approach is necessary, however, as children get used to the concept they can gradually take more responsibility and choose what information goes into their lapbook, and how to represent it. A more structured approach would involve giving a template for the layout, and offering more guidance as students plan, select and prepare content. As children develop their lapbooking skills, they can be encouraged to work more independently. This provides a good opportunity to encourage peer learning and creates opportunities for students to work collaboratively and cooperatively.

## Materials

A number of materials are necessary for lapbooking, most of these are found in the typical primary classroom, or can easily be brought from home by the students.

- ✓ **Basics:** To get started, all you need is paper, coloured card, colours, scissors, glue, and a stapler. Other possible materials include magazines and newspapers, scraps of paper, cloth or ribbon, split pins, small envelopes and any decorative bits and pieces children may have at home. However, I try to avoid plastic and glitter on an ecological basis and often discuss this with students. The children usually have plenty of ideas on materials they can re-use and recycle.
- ✓ **Folders:** The folder is the 'container' part of the lapbook and should be made of coloured card. They can be any size, shape or format. The most common format is A3 card folded into 3 parts.
- ✓ **Mini-books and foldables:** Inside the folder students create mini-books and foldables, where they share their learning. This might include new vocabulary they have learnt, a summary of a story, short texts or pictures. It's great to include a kinaesthetic element which is appealing for primary students. There are many free templates to choose from online.

## Types of lapbook

### Round-up Lapbook

A round up lapbook is one that can be created over a term or school year. It serves as a record of learning and can be used to revise and consolidate learning as well being a great way to share learning with family and friends at home.



*Round up lapbook*

### Mini-lapbook

A mini-lapbook is a smaller version that can focus on the learning objectives from a unit rather than from the whole term or school year. I like to punch holes in them and store them in a ring binder, creating a kind of interactive notebook.



*Mini lapbook*

### Culture and CLIL Lapbook

Lapbooks can be based on cultural or CLIL content and developed over a series of lessons, much like a project. Students research and present information with the support of the teacher who guides content and ensures students have the language and skills necessary to create and present their lapbooks.

### End of school memories lapbook

An end of school lapbook is a place for students to record key learning points from the year as well as good memories, important moments and anything they would like to remember. It's also a good opportunity for teachers to add a personal note for each student to help them on their English journey!



CLIL Lapbook, Ancient Egypt

### Summary

Lapbooks make learning visible and enjoyable. They contribute to a safe and cooperative learning environment where children have a voice and their ideas are valued. Why not try them with your primary learners?



End of school lapbook

**Sarah Howell** is an ELT author, teacher, teacher-trainer and speaker. Her publications include *Treetops*, *New Treetops*, *Young Treetops*, *Explore Treetops Rainbow Bridge* and *Think Big*. She is a Member of TESOL Italy's Executive Committee. In 2010, she was awarded the *Premio Cartagine* for the *Protection of Children and Youth* category. Her research interests include oracy, visible thinking and inclusive educational practices.



Jill Coombs



# PRIMARY

English through drama in the primary language classroom

**Jill Coombs**

Educational drama emanates from theatre and shares with it the element of ensemble; working together with imagination, trust and cooperation, to improvise and create something unique. However, unlike theatre, the focus of educational drama is on process rather than goals. And, rather than turning the spotlight on to the individual, educational drama is task and group orientated which means that shy, under confident students feel more comfortable expressing themselves. In other words, rather than putting on a pre-written play about going to the farmers market, students might role play the event together communicating in and through the creation of their own story.

Educational drama is multisensory. It draws on different learning modalities including audio, visual and kinaesthetic ensuring it appeals to many different abilities and orientations to learning. It is holistic in approach, in both its composite nature and its development of the whole child; encouraging the soft skills such as confidence building, social interaction as well as language learning. Consequently, it is ideal for integration into the topic based, personalized learning environment of the contemporary primary classroom, or to enrich the more traditional style classroom.

## How can educational drama help language development?

All language learners require oral practice, but this can sometimes be challenging to facilitate in the primary classroom. According to Chang Li-Yu (2012, p.7) 'Students often do not have a real reason to speak because the tasks do not motivate them or require them to say anything which they find meaningful.' Drama can provide the motive and opportunity for children to use language meaningfully. For example, asking and answering questions about likes and dislikes in English may not be motivating if you know all about your friend's preferences already. Asking children to create a character profile, and then ask and answer the same questions in character at a chosen place, for example a party, gives children a clear reason to speak.

Puppetry and masks are another tool which can encourage children to use language and provide additional practice opportunities. Whilst children generally have a great capacity for repetition, puppets can make the repetition of language more engaging, meaningful and fun. Lower primary students often speak more readily to or through puppets, and even upper primary students can respond positively, depending on the context where you teach and the preferences of individual learners. Improvising from behind the safety of a mask or puppet can enable children to find their voice, setting them on the path to more confident communication. Simple sets, props and costumes can further encourage this, as the students are transported into imaginary worlds and characters. For example, when exploring the theme of superheroes.

## Using educational drama in primary ELT

For children to feel comfortable working with educational drama, a safe environment where

experimentation is encouraged is essential. Educational drama can be introduced in many ways. Here are some suggestions taking games, stories and language practice as a starting point. Giving as much support as students need as well as focused feedback and encouragement will help to build trust and confidence and ensure students get the most out of these activities.

## Games

Many teachers already use games with primary students, often as warmers or to change the pace during lessons. Drama games instantly engage and focus learners, and can be used to introduce or practice language and skills work.

- ✓ Zip Zap Boing: Students pass the words zip, zap and boing around the circle using actions. The onomatopoeic words help students to project as they pass around the words, making it a good precursor to voice work.
- ✓ Help: Groups imagine they want to get off a desert island, and to signal to an approaching helicopter they have one minute to spell out the word 'help' using their bodies. As well as generating meaningful discussion, students have to work as a team and cooperate.

## Lexical range and use

- ✓ Show and tell: Drama can provide an imaginary context for a simple activity used in many primary classrooms. For example, to practice the lexical set of toys, or adjectives to describe them, the teacher takes the role of toymaker and asks students to invent new toys. Students plan, draw and present their work pretending to be toymakers.
- ✓ The adverb game: One student goes out of the room whilst the others select an adverb. The returnee then asks the students to do an action, which they do in the manner of the chosen adverb. The goal is to guess the word, providing practice of adverbs and their synonyms.

## Stories

Stories are a good starting point due to the appeal for the age group and their obvious educational value. Stories easily facilitate drama, as they already contain all the basics of character, setting, props and action. These activities can be used alongside the other pre, during and post reading activities that are often used in conjunction with storytelling in the primary classroom.

- ✓ Pre-reading: Describe the setting of the story for students to visualize. They can then discuss their ideas, and either draw the set or imagine it by designating a part of the classroom, using furniture for props. For example, a desk becomes a boat, or a door the entrance to a magical forest. Objects which appear in the story or belong to certain characters can be shown or given to students who speculate on who owns them, and how they might feature in the story. Apart from helping develop listening and comprehension skills, these activities raise curiosity and engagement in the story to come.
- ✓ Post-reading: Students can come up with questions that they would like to ask characters in the story, leading to an interview or play where children get into character and ask and answer questions. Here they are practising the fundamentals of conversation.

## An educational drama lesson framework

The following is a lesson plan with the objective to increase confidence and motivation, and provide language practice. It is based on the folktale *Monkey see, Monkey do* retold by Hugh Lupton (2001). This is a particularly good adaptation with its colourful pictures, rhythmic language and repetition of key phrases, important for children who learn in chunks.

## Pre reading drama activities

- ✓ Animal chains: Introduce an animal by doing an action and making a sound. Students pass this around the circle. They can then be invited to suggest their own animals to pass around. Finally introduce the animals from the story with corresponding actions, in this instance a monkey and a man.
- ✓ Enunciation exercises: Clarify and model some of the key phrases from the story, before repeating them to show different emotions such as excited, angry and sad. Students guess the feeling before practicing and repeating with a partner, paying particular attention to the tone of voice. As these appear in the reading of the story the children will naturally want to join in.

## Post reading drama activities

- ✓ Improvisation: After recalling the story, improvise a chosen scene, either in small groups or as a whole class. Encourage students to use speech and movement in the improvisation, so ensure that your telling of the story provides a good model and is both clear and dynamic. A good way to start the improvisation is by the teacher taking the character of the man whilst the students role play monkeys. Later, more confident students can then take it in turns to be the man. To add impact you could use real or created hats and a basket or box to represent the man's cart.
- ✓ Scripts: A script of the story can be created, either as a whole class where students need the support of the teacher or in small groups for higher level or more confident students. The scripts can be used to create a new play based on the story, with groups presenting their work to each other, using simple adapted or created props or costumes. Throughout the process of devising their group play there will be unscripted language exchange that may have little to do with the target language of the lesson, but everything to do with increased fluency and language development.

## Putting it together

Language teachers can sometimes worry about using drama in the classroom, however, drama helps to bring language to life, provides meaningful opportunities for children to use language and supports less confident students rather than putting them on the spot. Drama can be used to keep lessons fresh and exciting, to facilitate group work and allow students to imagine another reality. Educational drama, with its focus on process rather than product, and its inherent inclusion of values and soft skills, is a very valuable teaching tool that is perhaps now even more important than ever before.

**Jill Coombs** has spent her professional life working on communication, through theatre arts and education. A freelance education consultant based in Malaysia, Jill is a teacher trainer, curriculum writer and teacher. Her interests lie in creative approaches to learning and teaching, and she is a keen advocate of the use of drama in the language classroom.

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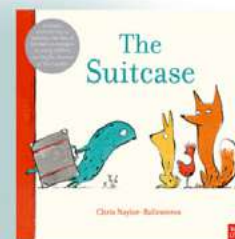
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Jo Cummins



## LOWER SECONDARY

Maximising the learning potential  
of projects

**Jo Cummins**

Using projects with lower secondary learners is nothing new. Many teachers use projects as a supplementary activity or as a break from what they consider to be more serious learning. However, could projects actually become more central to lower secondary learning? Is it possible to use them to teach grammar, vocabulary and skills? Or even for assessment?

Project-based learning (PBL) has been defined by the Buck Institute (2018) as 'a teaching method in which students learn by actively engaging in real-world and personally meaningful projects'. It can be thought of as the big sibling to task-based learning (TBL). Many of the same principles can be applied, such as, needing a communicative outcome and focusing on meaning before form - the same is certainly true of a successful project. Where PBL and TBL differ is in the scale and scope. A project will normally stretch over several lessons and have a more concrete result (a video, a presentation, an ebook) and the consequence of this is that any work on language or skills can be woven into the steps of the project. The teacher has more of an opportunity to respond to and prepare meaningful input at relevant stages of the project.

### Advantages

PBL works well with lower secondary students for a number of reasons. Firstly, learners of this age find projects motivating due to the tangible aim of something to produce. Rather than having an abstract learning outcome (e.g. using the present perfect to talk about experiences), a good project allows students to see how skills can be utilised in a real-world scenario. In addition, young teenagers in particular appreciate having the space to explore their own interests and ideas, and since projects provide many opportunities to give agency to students they can be highly motivating. By putting learners at the heart of the planning stage, the teacher can pursue topics that are of interest to the class and the individuals within the group. PBL is also a natural way to integrate skills work, such as listening and reading subskills when dealing with model texts, and micro skills when completing the project, such as discussion, brainstorming, drafting and re-drafting. Another advantage is that it is easy to incorporate key 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, such as digital literacy, creativity and imagination, student leadership and collaboration, and critical thinking and problem solving.

## Common issues and solutions

Many teachers follow a set curriculum and therefore have targets and learning outcomes that they need to cover, however, it is possible to cover this content successfully through project work. For example, a project on creating a presentation called 'What my city will be like in twenty years' could include language work on future forms and vocabulary related to places in a city (including pronunciation work), as well as skills work necessary for structuring a presentation and working in a group. By looking at the language points on the curriculum, a teacher can design and suggest projects where the language will arise naturally. In doing so, they are creating a much more authentic environment for the communication to occur as well as utilising class time more effectively by using a project as a mode of language instruction.

Another issue teachers are sometimes faced with is how to assess project work, particularly if the final product is done collaboratively. With project work it's important to assess not only the final project, but also the process of getting there, all the hard work the students put in along the way. A well designed rubric that covers both language and skills is vital, along with ensuring projects include a variety of tasks, both in terms of the mode of output and the interaction patterns used. Therefore, it is more than possible to successfully assess project-based work where necessary.

## A PBL framework

The following framework has been developed through examining how PBL is used in classrooms and how this can relate to contemporary pedagogical thinking. It is presented as a means of successfully facilitating PBL and can help to plan for, and circumvent, possible challenges. Diagram 1 illustrates this framework for PBL at lower secondary. It shows the steps the teacher and learners can take. The scope for interactions are indicated with arrows.

The process begins at the top, with teachers and learners interacting to decide on the project.

The process begins at the top, with teachers and learners interacting to decide on the project. The framework then proceeds sequentially, finishing with feedback and reflection

The framework aims to provide opportunities for teacher input, and to give learners the opportunities and flexibility to negotiate and drive what they are learning. Firstly, the learners and teacher together decide on the project. This could be a totally free choice or the teacher could suggest a topic (for example, a guide to your town). The class can then decide what form the output will take (a guide book, a poster, a video, an audio guide, etc) and whether they want to work in groups,

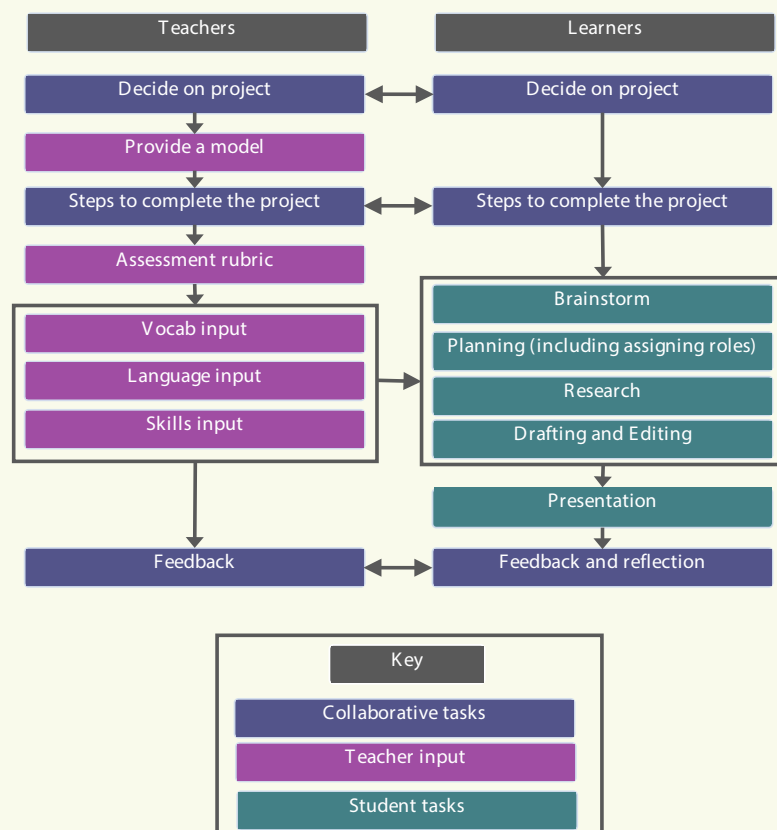


Diagram 1: A framework for project-based learning for lower secondary learners

individually or in a combination of both (for instance, if creating a town guide book, each person could write a different section before collating them into one book).

The teacher then needs to provide a model, which might be an example project that previous learners have made or some authentic materials. Then, the class and teacher can work together to define a series of steps that they will need to follow to complete the project. This section is important in order to make sure that there is consistency across the project groups and also that learners are working at a similar speed (otherwise some learners may jump in to creating a final project, while others spend a lot of time researching and drafting). Then, as the class is embarking on these steps, the teacher should be monitoring for opportunities for language input. Some opportunities might be obvious before starting on the project (for example, vocabulary that will be necessary) and some might become apparent as the learners are working and creating first drafts.

As Harding da Rosa (2018) maintains, the teacher is there ‘to coordinate and manage the whole process at every stage’. The teacher may find that they enter a cycle where they spend the first half of a class working on skills and language, before allowing learners time to work more independently on their projects and put into practice the language work they have done. Lower secondary learners are also more likely to need help with some more fundamental skills, for example, structuring a paragraph, creating a PowerPoint presentation or effective research skills. PBL creates a natural path to exploring a wide range of these skills.

The final step would be to provide feedback, both from the teacher and from the peers in the group, and also to give the learners a chance to reflect upon the process of working on the project and how satisfied they are with the final result.

### An example project and some suggestions

Diagram 2 shows the steps of how a project might look in practice. This example assumes the first step (decide on a project) is complete which, in this case, is to create a class anthology of creative writing. This example combines elements of both working individually and in groups and aims to illustrate the variation of skills that are involved in completing the project.

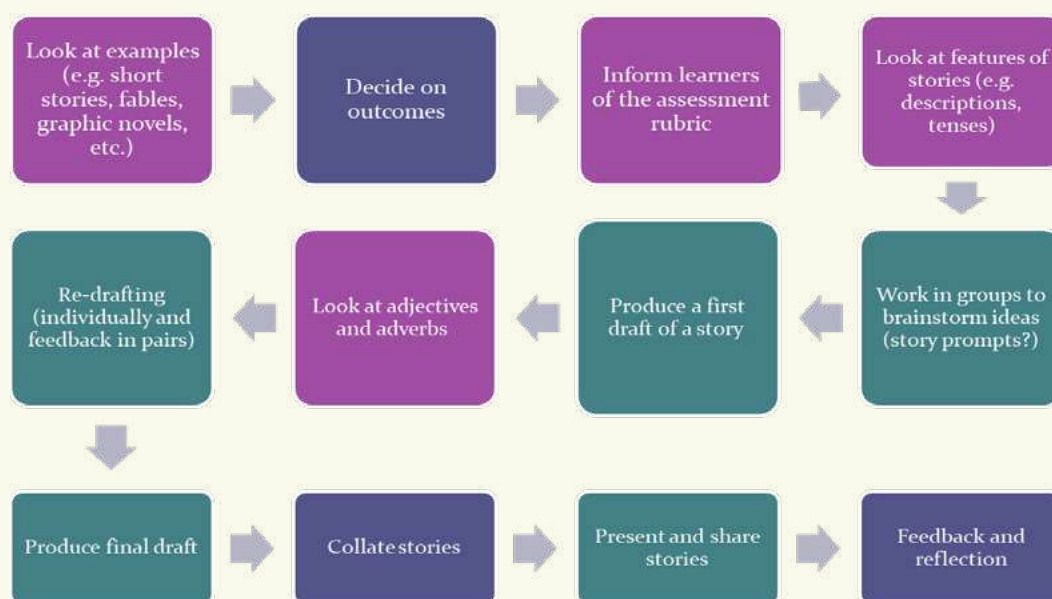


Diagram 2: 'Tell a Story' project to create a creative writing anthology

From the first step of reading, through to work on vocabulary and grammatical features, to re-drafting skills and giving feedback to peers, there are a lot of areas that can be focused on and expanded. This project would allow teachers to provide input in areas such as narrative tenses, descriptive language (adjectives and adverbs) and skills involved in redrafting and revising texts. Finally, learners have the opportunity to see the final project, which could either be printed and shared, read to each other in the style of a poetry reading (possibly inviting friends and families) or presented via an online flip book creator. For assessment, you can focus on not only the final project, but also how successfully learners had redrafted and how well they used the structures and skills presented.

It is always good to have projects that can be shared or seen to have an impact. For example, you could ask the learners to prepare a presentation on how to make their school more environmentally friendly and invite the school managers to choose one of the ideas to implement, or you could create a school newspaper to be distributed amongst the other students. Video and photo projects can be shared on school blogs or websites (as long as child safeguarding procedures are in place and parental / caregiver consent has been sought), or parents / caregivers can be invited to view completed projects at the end of term. It's very motivating for learners to share their work with people outside of their class and can help them to put extra effort into their work.

## Conclusion

Project-based learning is perfect for lower secondary learners. It allows students to personalize their learning and teachers to give meaningful input into a range of skills that will be invaluable for their students' future studies. Learners are motivated by seeing a real-world outcome as well as being able to pursue areas that are personally interesting to them; and teachers have an opportunity to provide language instruction that is relevant and that learners are able to use immediately. It's crucial for learners at this life stage to have a clear framework or structure to guide them through the steps they need to complete. This also ensures that learners are working at a similar depth and on a similar timeline to complete their work. If you've never tried project-based learning, why not give it a try and see how your class respond?

**Jo Cummins** is a freelance teacher and materials developer, based in the UK, who specialises in secondary and adult materials. She is interested in making classrooms and materials more creative and relevant to learners. She is currently studying for an MA TESOL. Her book *50 Ways To Teach Teenagers* is available through Wayzgoose Press.

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Olha Madylus



## LOWER SECONDARY

### Talking to... Olha Madylus

Getting the most out of online lessons

With many teachers now conducting lessons for lower secondary students online, there is much we all have to learn about lessons in the digital world. For this *Talking to...* **Amanda Davies (AD)** has been talking to **Olha Madylus (OM)** for insights and advice on getting the most out of online lessons.

**AD:** What do you see as the main challenges for teachers and lower secondary students who are having lessons online?

**OM:** Many of us have used the internet for years and feel comfortable with what we *can* do such as send email and stay connected via various social media platforms, but that doesn't prepare us for teaching online which is certainly overwhelming for some. I believe that during this challenging time lower secondary teachers are concerned for the well-being of their students and want to do their best, but they must remember not to put too much pressure on themselves. There are a few key issues we must bear in mind: that online teaching is not what we have been trained to do, that this situation is not going to go on forever and that what we are doing now is essentially a stop gap to tide us over until we get back into our classrooms. We can only do so much and sometimes a little goes a long way.

The teachers I work with have a number of concerns, for example that their students may not do their work, may not engage in lessons appropriately and may even cheat. This is a particular concern for teachers using a platform that does not allow them to see

their students. However, there has never been a better time to start trusting students and relinquishing control where appropriate. That doesn't mean ignoring our concerns. It's crucial to address these issues from the start by talking to our students, in L1 if necessary, about the advantages and limitations of online lessons. We need to make clear our expectations but also listen to our students' concerns and experiences so we can all work together to make the experience as pleasant as possible for all concerned. This will help to foster more of a team spirit where everyone can be open and express themselves.

For students of all ages this is a challenging and potentially disturbing time. Lower secondary students may be expected to adapt to online lessons with ease, in particular since we often assume young teenagers are digital natives and will have no problems with technology. However, many students of this age only have limited knowledge and are finding the increased screen time as overwhelming and difficult as the rest of us. What's more, their routines will have been disrupted and home life may be difficult, especially if there are many family members at home all trying to work and study online. Many won't have their own device or even a private space to work in.

**AD:** And what are the benefits for the lower secondary age group in particular?

**OM:** I think being allowed a greater amount of autonomy can be very good for this age group. During an online lesson they have to

take more responsibility in terms of their effort and participation since the teacher can see far less and has fewer opportunities to influence the learning environment. Online lessons also provide many opportunities for fun and personalisation, which is also crucial for lower secondary learners. Students can introduce their pets to the class, or you can organise a scavenger hunt where students have a certain amount of time to find particular objects around the home.

Another benefit I have seen is the possibility for independent study. When we teach in the classroom we tend to have all students working on more or less the same tasks at the same time. Online learning presents many opportunities for independent study which means students can focus on their personal development areas or the things that interest them. Students can use answer keys to check their own work, perhaps in their own time, making this kind of differentiation easier to manage than in the face to face classroom.

Mentoring is also an area we can develop. It can be tricky in a busy classroom to talk openly with students on a one to one basis, everyone always wants to listen to what the teacher has to say and students can be reticent to talk. When using an online platform mentoring can be done via a personal chat, or in a breakout room. Students may feel more able to talk openly about their learning, their problems and successes and what we can do to help them. It also allows teachers to give individual feedback and encouragement and show students that we still care, despite the distance.

**AD:** Since the majority of lessons moved online, there have been countless resources to help teachers transition. However, this has heavily focused on the technical side of online teaching. What support do teachers need now?

**OM:** What we all need now is to work out how classroom-based learning is best transferred to online lessons. I think this is something we need to work on together, as this is a completely new situation. One way to ensure

best practice is shared is making sure we open a dialogue about what works. However, I'd say the thing that teachers most need right now is reassurance and support. We're all in this together but it's easy to feel very alone when you're at home in front of a computer all day. I'd recommend teachers from the same schools set up a system for sharing ideas, asking questions and giving mutual support. This happens on a daily basis in the live staffroom, so we need a virtual version now.

**AD:** How can teachers ensure lower secondary learners are engaged and involved during online lessons?

**OM:** When it comes to lessons I have always been an advocate of the KISS principle, which stands for keep it short and simple. Avoid long plenary style explanations and break online lessons up into short stages which include independent study. Projects are also very good as they usually require students to work collaboratively to produce something.

As with any young learner class, it helps to establish routines. Ask students to prepare their work space and make sure they have all their materials ready before the lesson. Plan lessons around a regular pattern, such as starting with a check-in, a quick recap of the last lesson and sharing what is coming up today. Make sure students have a chance to let off steam during learning, and finish with some revision and a review of what was learnt. Knowing what to expect will help students to feel safe, relaxed and less likely to be distracted.

As I mentioned earlier, it's important to trust learners and be open with them about how their online learning is going. If you feel something isn't going as well as you'd like, ask your students to reflect on it before trying to solve the problem by yourself. For example, ask students to consider how much they participated, if it was enough, and whether they could participate more in the next lesson. You don't have to get feedback on this, sharing your concerns and asking students to reflect may be enough.

**AD:** What training would lower secondary teachers benefit from if teaching remains online, either due to the current situation or due to future demand?

**OM:** I think this would be very personalised and depend on the context of the teachers. I think for now, it would be good for teachers to keep a diary and record after lessons information such as what went well,

what gaps they noticed in their skills and knowledge, what they discovered that will transfer to the classroom when we return to normal and what they really want to develop. I think this will be crucial if we are to learn from this situation, as once we are back at school it will be easy to forget lessons learned in the euphoria of returning to normality.

**Olha Madylus** has taught in the UK, Greece, Hong Kong and Venezuela and is based in London. She works as a freelance author, educational consultant and teacher educator for organisations including the British Council, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge Assessment English and ministries of education around the world.

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Rebecca Warren



## UPPER SECONDARY

English on the Margins: The challenges and opportunities of teaching young refugees in Bangkok, Thailand

**Rebecca Warren**

This article will focus on upper secondary refugees living in Bangkok, Thailand. It will particularly explore ideas and learning from my experience of teaching them voluntarily as well as my doctoral research into the experiences of young refugees in extended exile in Bangkok.

I will discuss the socio-political background of refugee education in Thailand and the wider region in addition to themes that emerged from my research. I will also share a capabilities framework of recommendations for urban refugee education that responds to the needs, experiences and aspirations of the research participants, parents / caregivers and professionals working with refugees.

### Situation for teenage refugees in Thailand

Thailand has never ratified the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol. This convention recognises the right for people to seek protection in another country if they are facing persecution and danger in the country they are fleeing. Thailand does however host a large population of forced migrants, mainly from Myanmar. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is allowed to operate in Bangkok, therefore people seeking protection in Thailand are regarded as illegal migrants, displaced persons, or 'persons of concern to the UNHCR' (UNESCO, 2014).

However, due to the illegal status of refugees, the UNHCR is only able to offer very limited protection and refugees are constantly at risk of harassment from the police, arrest and indefinite detention. This places significant restrictions on a refugee's freedom of movement, ability to access employment, education, social opportunities and other life enhancing activities and survival strategies. In turn, this leads to feelings of marginalisation and isolation that pervade even the youngest members of refugee communities.

The legal restrictions placed on a refugee's freedom of movement and ability to access essential services also has significant implications for Thailand's progress towards meeting international educational agendas such as [Education for All](#), [Sustainable Development Goal Four](#), and the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), all of which Thailand is a signatory to. These aim for universal education for all children and young people for a minimum of twelve years, regardless of nationality, citizenship status, ethnicity, gender or ability (The Thai National Commission for UNESCO, 2015). Thailand has made very good progress towards meeting these aims, particularly in minimising the gender gap in educational access and attainment (Lathapipat and Sondergaard, 2015).

However, teenage migrants, both forced and voluntary, continue to represent the largest proportion of out of school children in Thailand. According to Thailand's most recent migration report, 164,000 migrant children are currently enrolled in school, while the number of out of school children is estimated to be at around 200,000 (Harkins, 2019). This indicates that although certain initiatives and levers have been put in place to increase access to education for marginalised populations in Thailand, these are often implemented in an ad hoc manner, are not being monitored adequately, are subject to the individual whims of educational establishments, and are not sufficiently addressing the many barriers facing these populations. This is particularly relevant to refugee populations who, in addition to facing language and cultural barriers, and financial constraints, are constantly at risk of harassment, arrest and indefinite detention.

## Resourcefulness and resilience

Despite these many obstacles, urban refugee communities living in extended exile in Bangkok develop their own survival strategies, networks of support, and navigate access to services, demonstrating a remarkable level of resilience and resourcefulness. If they are unable to access mainstream services such as education, they create their own, utilising whatever means available. In my research, I encountered a number of communities that had set up shared home school facilities in rooms and sometimes corridors of apartment buildings. Young people had also established peer networks where older and more educated members would tutor and assist others with their studies, with minimal access to resources and space. The most useful sources of learning identified by many of the participants were online learning platforms such as YouTube and the [Khan Academy](#). Although not everyone had access to Wi-Fi and a computer, access could be shared, and communal sources invested in.

Access to recognised certification for learning was also identified as a common need among the research participants, particularly the upper secondary aged teenagers. This was referred to as 'the right to certification' by Broadhead (2013). Without this as an aim, many of the respondents reported feeling unmotivated, a common theme that has emerged from refugee education in other contexts. Since refugees are unable to stay in Thailand indefinitely, many are aware of the need for English language education and qualifications that will be recognised in English-speaking countries where they are hoping to be resettled to. Therefore, in the capability framework of recommendations for refugee education that I developed in response to my research, identifying ways for young refugees to access certified learning courses was a key aim. Next, I will discuss how one particular learning centre in Bangkok, where I serve as a volunteer teacher and education advisor, is modelling approaches that emerged from the research.

## A suggested framework

CEDAR (Creating Education Diversity Aspiration Resilience) Learning Centre is based in a small privately rented house in an area of Bangkok with a high concentration of refugees. It was set up by a refugee, with the help of religious groups and civil society members. About twenty students attend the centre and are divided into age and ability groups. There is a classroom and a computer room with ten donated computers. The learning centre receives no public funding or support from refugee organisations in Bangkok and the house rent and other expenses are covered by individual sponsors, which can be quite a precarious source of financing.

All the teachers are volunteers, and most are doing it alongside full-time working responsibilities so have minimal time to commit, although their enthusiasm for the learning centre is significant. The older students are working towards taking the General Educational Development Exams (GED), recognised as a high school diploma equivalent in North America for alternative education

providers. The four elements to the exam are math, science, language arts and social studies.

The students use online learning platforms and other digital resources to help them which are usually recommended, set up and allocated by the volunteer teachers. The students send their teachers written work via email or Google classroom and feedback is given either in person, when the teachers are available, or online. Students need to be proactive and autonomous in their learning and support each other through peer networks. Every month at CEDAR Learning Centre, a peer leader is elected who can represent the needs of the students to the teachers, parents/caregivers and school principal.

The learning centre also provides a much-needed social space for the students, most of whom are unable to access mainstream education in Thailand, were out of school for a number of months and in some cases years, and experienced isolation and mental health difficulties as a result. The founding director has set up critical support networks with organisations in Bangkok that can address the psychosocial needs of the students, provide life skills training such as cooking, internet safety and sexual health, provide books and resources and assist with progress towards certification. For books, I was able to arrange a donation from the private language school I was working for.

## Summary

CEDAR learning centre runs on an extremely minimal budget and demonstrates what can be achieved through collaboration, innovation, networking and peer support. Over the four years that I have been researching refugee education in Bangkok, it is the best of its kind, yet receives no institutionalised funding or recognition from international organisations such as the UNHCR. Often the excuse for low investment in refugee education initiatives in many countries is a lack of financial resources, yet models like CEDAR show what can be achieved with ingenuity, creativity and agency. Most refugees are used to surviving with minimal financial access so learn to utilise what resources they do have and develop survival strategies and community support mechanisms with these limited means. Learning from this level of resilience and innovativeness can serve as an important lesson for populations less in need, especially in times of global crises like the one we are currently experiencing.

**Rebecca Warren** is an English language teacher, youth worker and educational researcher. She has worked with refugees for ten years, both in the UK where she is from, and in Thailand, where she currently resides. Rebecca is completing doctoral research into the educational experiences of young refugees in Bangkok, Thailand.

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David Valente



## UPPER SECONDARY

Beyond the Margins – Including lived realities in upper secondary ELT materials

**David Valente**

Marginalised people such as minority ethnic groups, refugees and asylum seekers, members of non-traditional families, those with visible disabilities and those identifying as LGBTQIA\* are very rarely included in upper secondary ELT materials. However, the politics of recognition, powerfully reflected by seminal movements including #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter, show how teenagers are using social media such as Instagram to argue for equal rights for transgender people and YouTube to speak out against police brutality and racial bias.

The prolific online activity of this age range (circa 15 – 17 years old) provides compelling evidence of their genuine desire to demonstrate support for the many Others on the margins globally. Furthermore, as communication between teenagers around the world increasingly takes place via English (Rothoni, 2019), we have an urgent responsibility as language educators to include the lived realities of diverse groups in our teaching materials. Thereby, providing an educational 'space' for their voices to be heard and for global concerns to move beyond the margins to occupy a central position within mainstream ELT.

### Authentic materials as vehicles for discovery

To address the materials lacuna highlighted above, I will share key principles for crafting upper secondary teaching materials which enable teenagers to encounter Other lives and worlds, to develop empathy with the experiences of marginalised groups, and ultimately, to potentially shift their perspectives. Throughout this article, I will be positioning teen-relevant authentic materials such as spoken word poetry, YouTube clips, billboard campaigns and creative adverts as powerful vehicles for learner discovery, rather than more reductive didactic teaching materials, which can often lead to English teachers giving their learners lessons 'on' or 'about' difference.

My inspiration for creating English lesson sequences based around authentic materials comes from research including Heggernes's (2019) study on teenagers' curiosity about intercultural themes in ELT. She drew on a dialogic framework to analyse conversations between learners about authentic literature in order to provide evidence of intercultural discovery and perspective shifting in action. Another study by Waallann Brown (2019) aimed to explore the bridge between awareness and action using authentic images to enable upper secondary learners to discover and potentially challenge cultural stereotypes. This research is a crucial reminder of how infrequently teenagers are afforded opportunities via English language materials to genuinely question the status quo. The findings additionally illuminate the positive impact that principled use of authentic materials can have on both awareness raising and potential action taking by teenagers.

## Learner involvement in compiling authentic materials

When using materials based on the realities of marginalised groups, it is vital to reflect on issues of potential appropriation as well as questions surrounding authenticity of experience. Adichie's frequently cited 2009 TED Talk warns of the limiting effects of a single story, and a recent interview with MeToo founder, Tarana Burke (2020) highlights the crucial importance of recognising the intersectionality of marginalised groups. Her reference to the interrelatedness between MeToo and Black Lives Matter, as cited in Gill and Rahman-Jones (ibid), demonstrates how:

*These are both movements that are about fighting against injustice. They're both movements that are predicated on undoing systems of oppression... If we're not talking about race and gender, if we're not talking about racism and sexism, if we're not talking about patriarchy alongside white supremacy, then we're not having full robust conversations.*

To apply Burke's argument to the ELT context specifically and address how materials may overly compartmentalise issues and struggles, materials writers and teachers could use 'text ensembles' (Delanoy, 2018) i.e. a wide variety of texts reflecting nuanced intersections. Bland (2020) maintains how this can be particularly empowering by enabling learners to compile their own text ensembles for the classroom through collaborative research online. Such personalised investment in the materials compilation process could also increase teenagers' willingness to engage in social justice actions beyond the language classroom.

## Principles for writing EDI-focused materials

In her blog post on emerging principles for ELT materials writing, Bilsborough (2017) questions whether it is perhaps timely to reconsider some of the more established principles or even develop our own. Given the dearth of upper secondary ELT materials with age-relevant equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) themes, I have adopted Bilsborough's suggestions by crafting my own bespoke EDI-focused materials writing principles. As you read the set of ten principles, consider how each could be applied to particular teen-relevant authentic materials in the English language classroom.

1. Use authentic materials with **powerful visual contexts** as 'entry points' to engage teenagers and provoke thought.

*Leading in with short, striking YouTube clips or billboard slogans for example, sets the lesson context briskly and elicits immediate reactions and personalised responses from teenagers.*

2. Diagnose learners' EDI awareness and **build their schemata** by feeding in content via the authentic materials.

*Having pair work with 'diagnostic' discussion questions early in the lesson establishes learners' topic awareness, life experiences and language repertoires. You can then draw on the authentic material in a responsive way to scaffold their awareness and model contextualised language.*

3. Share the **EDI focus** of authentic materials when outlining the lesson aims.

*Using a lesson menu helps to clearly frame the lesson in terms of particular EDI dimensions that each of the tasks are developing.*

4. Craft concrete **age-relevant outcomes** which are creative, collaborative and clearly linked to the authentic materials.

*Adopting a task-based approach by having learners compile text ensembles in groups helps them engage deeply around EDI issues.*

5. Upgrade and extend learners' **person-respecting language** to talk and write about the lived experiences of marginalised groups.

*Equipping learners with up to date lexis to sensitively communicate about marginalised groups requires learner-centred noticing tasks. These should help teenagers identify nuances in meaning, use and appropriacy.*

6. Create **visual metaphors** to help teenagers explore issues of inclusion and exclusion in an age-accessible and memorable way.

*Telling teenagers to put themselves in other people's shoes can often feel abstract and lacking in resonance. However, engaging visuals requiring learners to brainstorm emotions and feelings 'inside the boxes' for example, encourages more tangible perspective shifting.*

7. Extend beyond comprehension questions and immerse teenagers in **deeper viewing, listening to and reading** authentic texts.

*Disrupting the prevailing 'right answerism' tendency in upper secondary ELT materials by moving away from true / false questions and encouraging teens to consider texts from different perspectives helps promote deeper learning.*

8. Retain a strong focus on empowerment by helping teenagers to use the authentic materials as **springboards to subvert marginalisation**.

*Designing tasks which provide scaffolding for teenagers to create their own empowering messages with elements of choice gives them ownership.*

9. Incorporate links in the materials to **potential social justice actions** in the learners' lives beyond the English language classroom.

*Selecting authentic materials based around current social justice campaigns and movements such as #BlackLivesMatter and having learners do mini projects linked to these campaigns increases the likelihood of teenagers taking action outside of ELT.*

10. Provide time and space in materials for teenagers to **systematically review their EDI learning** and develop their metacognitive awareness.

*Asking reviewing questions which enable learners to reflect on what they have done in relation to the materials, why they have done it and perhaps most importantly, what they need to do next in terms of actions makes learning both coherent and purposeful.*

### EDI lesson framework for authentic materials

Based on the ten principles above, I have developed this 6-stage flexible teaching framework for crafting upper secondary English lessons around authentic materials:

1. Initial awareness raising tasks



2. Deep reading / viewing / listening tasks



3. Person-respecting language noticing tasks



4. Creative and collaborative oral / written tasks



5. Beyond the classroom tasks



6. Reflective reviewing tasks



The **special appendix** accompanying this publication (please see the [Resources page](#) of the IATEFL YLTSIG website), comprises three detailed examples of the principles and teaching framework in action. IATEFL YLTSIG members would be particularly interested in discovering how this authentic materials framework is applied in your teaching and learning context.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to particularly thank **Daniel Xerri** and the ELT Council Malta team as well as IATEFL YLTSIG Community Development Coordinator, **Laura McWilliams** and the secondary teaching team at British Council France for inviting me to give teacher development sessions on including lived realities in upper secondary ELT. Their support and encouragement really helped shape my ideas and passion into tangible ELT materials for upper secondary English teachers and learners.

**David Valente** is Coordinator of the IATEFL Young Learners and Teenagers Special Interest Group. He works as a PhD Research Fellow in English Language and Literature Subject Pedagogy at Nord University, Norway, where he teaches on the Master's degree in Primary Education. He is also Reviews Editor for the *Children's Literature in English Language Education (CLELE) Journal*. David's main interests are interculturality, children's and young adult literature in ELT and primary and secondary English teacher education.

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Shelagh Rixon



# REVIEWS

## Children and teachers as co-researchers in Indian primary English classrooms

Annamaria Pinter, Rama Mathew and Richard Smith  
(British Council TeachingEnglish, 2016)

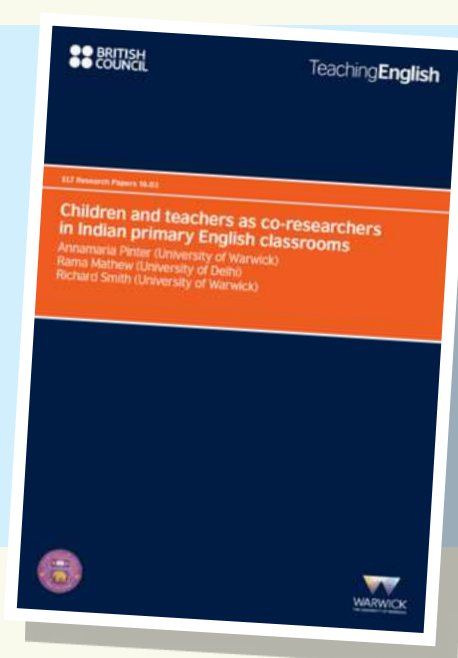
Reviewed by Shelagh Rixon

It is always welcome to have evidence that goes beyond the anecdotal showing that children thrive when given the chance to participate in their learning both in decision-making and in action. This account of a research project sponsored by the British Council in India and supporting 25 teacher-researchers, gives us that and more. It is readable not only as a report on the overall project which aimed to introduce teachers and children from a wide variety of geographical areas and types of school to the possibilities of researching with children but also as a source of insight into children's thinking and a repository of some of the activities that children themselves were empowered to carry out as a result.

The report is available free online so is a resource which trainers and teachers can readily access.

It falls into five sections: the Introduction which describes the set up of the overall project; a brief Literature Review which traces the history of varied types of research involving children; an account of the Research Design; the Results; and Summary and Implications.

It is too easy for researchers to get precious about terminology for the types of research in which it is possible to engage. The authors of this report avoid this. In the Literature Review they highlight an extremely important set of distinctions where research involving children is concerned. The traditional model has always been research **on** children – children as objects of study and observation who quite often would be entirely unaware that they were being investigated. Developments away from this model can be seen to have proceeded in rough sequence over time with increases in adult-child collaboration and more autonomy and awareness on the part of the children until we arrive at a stage when in some cases children are devising and carrying out their own projects (research **by** children). The Indian project under discussion is more in the research **with** children mode – with adults (teachers) and English Language learners working together to discover more about optimising their conditions



of teaching and learning and allowing the children to have their say. Having had their say, in many cases the children were enabled then to implement their ideas to test if they did indeed lead to better (and more willing) learning. Adults were still 'in charge' in that the classroom projects took place within the educational structures and expectations that teachers and children were working within so that teachers had an overall guiding role. However, once the parameters were agreed upon, it seems that children had their special roles and a good deal of freedom. This would justify classifying their status in the project as 'social actors' rather than passive subjects of study. As we shall see, later, the results of several of the mini projects were changes in the way some learning in schools was handled thereafter.

How the overall project itself should be referred to in terms of research typology could be discussed at some length, more than perhaps matters. The main adults implementing it were teachers in their own classrooms and thus a choice might be made between Action Research or Exploratory Practice as the better term. For me, the project fits most easily into an Exploratory Practice model. However, it is Exploratory Practice within an externally sponsored and driven initiative (the main project) with a strong teacher education purpose. The work carried out was staged around three main events – three workshops for teachers - and thus fits into the fairly familiar cycle of a teacher education model designed to promote innovation – Set Up; Interim Reports; and Sharing of Results. The underlying intent seems to have been to allow teachers – many of whom were initially sceptical about their pupils' capacity to work and investigate independently – to find ways of investigating classroom life with their children that might lead to benefits that would be apparent to teachers and children alike.

Teachers were given some local mentorship and the main researchers, Pinter and Mathew, supported data collection and analysis. It is notable that there were no dropouts. Data were derived from the teachers' private diaries kept during the interventions and from written and spoken responses by both adults and children to interview questions. There were also numerous artefacts from the various separate school-level projects (e.g., posters, work samples, puppets, questionnaire results, children's writing). For me, therefore, it looks more like a pedagogically-oriented teacher education experiment that was very thoroughly evaluated rather than a research project in the strict sense. But, as I said, it is best sometimes not to get too picky about terminology.

The research questions used to structure the overall project were as follows:

### **What do children think about learning English and acting as co-researchers in Indian primary schools?**

- What do they like and enjoy about learning English?
- What do they want to change about their English classes?
- What would they like to explore in their English classes?

### **What are teachers' views about working with children as co-researchers?**

- What are the benefits?
- What are the challenges?

### **Outcomes and discussion**

As mentioned above, teachers came from many regions in India, from several different types of schools (state, private, rural, urban, English medium and not), and there was also a wide range

of ages and levels of experience and training amongst the group. Therefore, each one was supported in taking a path that suited their circumstances and level of confidence and the local levels of support available. Different categories of classroom projects emerged, depending on the context and situation.

Some teachers worked with ways of eliciting children's opinions about their learning. This itself was found to lead to more engagement with learning and more meaningful choices. Other interventions went further, with children seeking solutions to a known problem and then trying them out – in many cases with some success and leading to genuine changes in schools. Examples are investigating their own unwillingness to undertake holiday homework, finding ways for the teacher to get away from boring rote-learning methods in 'revision lessons' and investigating reasons for their own difficulties in meeting deadlines. Farther on along this continuum, some learners were enabled to undertake an actual inquiry into a matter of interest to them, through using questionnaires or interviews. One very striking example is of school children interviewing street children who could not go to school, thus raising their own awareness of issues of social justice.

Great strides in confidence and motivation were reported by both teachers and children, with some normally 'left out' children benefiting from opportunities to cooperate with others and to make contributions that were valued.

Was the 'children as co-researchers' label fully justified in all cases? Perhaps not, as the report acknowledges, but it seems that everyone moved closer to a notion of what this might mean and that children are capable of taking on such roles. As the report states: 'Teachers were genuinely surprised by the fact that learners behaved responsibly and maturely when they had the chance to find things out for themselves.'

### Issues: sustainability and ethical approval

Some issues were raised about the sustainability of some initiatives – what would happen when the children changed class, for example? However, it seems very hopeful that many of the children involved have increased their resilience to a point that will allow them to maintain their more proactive mindsets. The change in the teachers' attitudes is also perhaps destined for long life and possibly diffusion amongst colleagues.

The ethics of working and researching with children is always a complex but vital area of attention. As the report states, overall ethical approval was granted by Warwick University, but it is clear that in an international and multi-layered project such as this, not all actions can be centrally filtered and some delegation of responsibility and accommodation to local expectations needs to be made. I wondered if the example of interviewing street children would have made it through centralised ethics filters, while remaining glad from what I saw on the page that it had been done. This example seems very close to, if not actually, research **by** children.

### What is there for a take-away by different sorts of reader?

Practitioners (teachers, trainers, writers, some researchers) read accounts such as this for different reasons, and this report will amply repay different types of attention. As stated at the beginning, its main overall value is as another piece of well-documented and therefore convincing evidence that children flourish when invited to engage more with their own learning

and that teachers would benefit from believing this and acting in this spirit. It could also serve as a blue-print for a teacher education initiative in the same area. The research approaches adopted by Pinter and Mathew to elicit and analyse the views of participants is another area of interest, although in this short version of the project write-up less is said about this. However, there are also more detailed take-aways from the report. Directly adopting versions of some of the children’s suggestions for improving aspects of their learning is tempting in many cases – and the report and its illustrations give enough information to support this. (I particularly loved the poster giving the results for why children found it problematic to meet deadlines).

This report is short, well-written and available free on-line. It will have many uses from private reading to use as a discussion text in a teacher education setting. Highly recommended.

**Shelagh Rixon** spent the first part of her career in the English Language Division of the British Council. From 1991 to 2010 she was a lecturer in the Department of Applied Linguistics at Warwick University. She now works with the MA in Applied Linguistics and TESOL at Leicester University.



Kate Gregson



# REVIEWS

## Teaching English to Pre-Primary Children

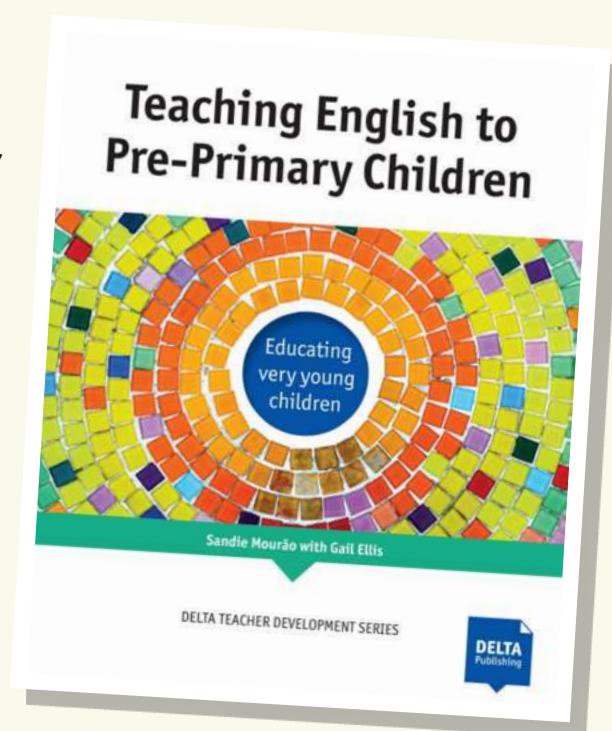
Sandie Mourão with Gail Ellis  
(Klett, 2020)

Reviewed by Kate Gregson

Arriving in Japan around 25 years ago, fairly fresh off my ELT certificate course, I was thrown into the deep end of the Young Learner teaching world, with classes of children aged 18 months and upwards. It took me much of their early childhood to learn to swim.

Those children are now adults, but the average starting age of English language education globally is getting lower and lower, making this is an ever-growing concern among ELT professionals. Today, as a YL specialist consultant and teacher educator, my work involves various primary and pre-primary contexts, where I often encounter teachers in similar situations to mine in Japan. They are joined by generalist pre-primary teachers, perhaps in schools or kindergartens, who find themselves required to teach English, and those without any teaching background whatsoever. Understandably, they commonly feel lost, unsupported and professionally over-challenged, lacking ideas of where to go to for help. It is for such an audience that this book is intended, and will also be of value to more experienced teachers of English in pre-primary education.

There already exists a small handful of useful titles available on the market for pre-primary English teachers providing practical ideas and photocopiable TEPP resources (e.g. Puchta & Elliott, 2017; Reilly & Ward, 1997), which generally also note theoretical underpinnings, and are clearly valuable to pre-primary English teachers. What makes *Teaching English to Pre-Primary Children* stand apart from these is its broader focus, and its careful balance between underlying theory and its practical application. It emphasises teaching the whole child, not the separation of ELT. Here, following Vygotskian principles, the child is at the centre of their holistic learning and development, supported by adult facilitation and scaffolding through providing meaningful learning experiences.



## At a glance

*Teaching English to Pre-Primary Children* follows various organisational features, centering around three main frameworks. Firstly, it follows an adaptation of Mourão's 'EEE' model, 'Encounter, Engage, Exploit' (see p. 88), which originally relates to staging of TEPP language sessions, where children move from contextualized introduction to repetition and practice, before meaningful use in different situations. Here, Part A, *Encounter*, introduces and discusses theoretical perspectives of TEPP; Part B, *Engage*, provides practical ideas for the application of this theory; lastly, *Exploit*, Part C, explores ways to extend and deepen understanding through reflective practice.

### Part A

Part A opens with a clear statement on the purpose of the book: to support teachers in their endeavor to ensure that children's early language learning experience paves the way for positive life-long language learning, guided by an approach which considers the development of the whole child. This *Encounter* section addresses various relevant areas relating to characteristics and development in various domains, noting their implications for language teaching and learning. It provides a broad picture of key aspects at suitable depth and detail for the needs of practicing TEPP teachers. The development tables (pp. 33-39) for different domains, adapted from Early Education (2012), are particularly useful for an at-a-glance idea of what children of different ages are, on average, developmentally capable of in each area, alongside due reminder of the caveat that children develop at different rates in different domains. Part A culminates in a set of 10 pedagogical principles, which draw together recurring themes in a concise and coherent list, which underpin Part B, and serve as an organizing principle in Part C.

### Part B

Next, *Engage* moves from general theory to more specific, adding practical ideas in 10 topic-based chapters. Each chapter begins with underlying theory, moves on to explicit linking between the chapter focus and wider education, and is followed by practical activities. This bank of ideas and supporting materials is extended on the DELTA publishing website see <https://www.deltapublishing.co.uk/9783125013995-teaching-english-to-pre-primary-children/c-57> in a series of printables, adding to the book's take-away value. Here, we can find ready-to-use materials, supported by clearly explained procedures for their use and key reminders and considerations for implementing them in the classroom. Each chapter finishes with a return to a focus on educating the whole child in its broader sense. The chapters are sequential, beginning with the collection of context and learner data at the beginning of teaching. They move on to look at different pre-primary learning areas: songs, chants and rhymes; games and game-like activities; sharing stories; early literacy; science and technology; numeracy; visual arts and looking at learning (assessment of and for learning). The content in these chapters is fresh, innovative and, although each of them could probably be extended into a book by themselves, the level of detail is sufficient, perhaps whetting the reader's appetite for further investigations (such as those in Part C).

A simple web search would help us find useful ideas for using stories in TEPP, pre-primary

science, technology or literacy, but it is far less common to find such sustained and principled connections between and integration of these areas and TEPP, as we can here. Practical suggestions are highly valuable, although don't end at the level of printable worksheets or activity outlines. For example, Annita Demitroff, who authored Chapter 7 (Science & Technology), gives plenty of practical support in setting up and undertaking S&T activities. Similarly, Chapter 10, *Looking at Learning*, promotes the involvement of various 'voices' in the collection of evidence of learning, adding to and challenging more common understandings of assessment practices.

### Part C

The focus and content of the Part B chapters may push us to question our existing views or practices by introducing new perspectives on TEPP, where learning from different disciplines is integrated for holistic child development. On completing these chapters, the reader may well feel mentally invigorated – and ready for Part C, *'Exploit'*, which aims to deepen and focus thinking through reflection on classroom practice. It centres around the 10 principles central to Parts A and B, as mentioned. This part aims to stimulate further thinking, support reflection and bring new, refined ideas into practice within the reader's context. For each principle, the EEE model, with a further two Es ('Evaluate' and 'Extend'), structures the reader's journey from theory to practice and then to reflection through a series of suggested activities (e.g. awareness-raising questionnaires, matching or ranking activities, etc.). The reader may then be invited to investigate and reflect on ideas in their classroom, further evaluate and consider future investigations. Commentaries allow the reader to self-evaluate and further reflect, either individually or collaboratively, and printable handouts of the tasks are provided in the online resources, making them particularly worthy for use in training and other professional development activities.

### Overall

This combination of theory, practice and stimulus for guided reflection is a veritable selling point of this book. While this is not unique among DELTA Publishing's titles (see Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015), this makes the title beneficial to the field of Teacher Education. Not only does it encourage professional development activity among teachers, it could usefully be in the running for a training handbook in a TEPP training course, whether trainees are pre- or early service, are in-service ELT teachers or non-language specialist pre-primary teachers. The Part B chapters might serve as a coherent and complete basis for a course syllabus, and the content and message of the book would help develop well- and roundly-educated, reflective TEPP practitioners. The writers note that the book is a little Euro-centric and more applicable to developed, Western(ised) contexts, although they have nonetheless addressed the needs of teachers in different educational settings from mainstream education to private language schools throughout the book.

From this, it may seem that the organisation of the book is a little complex, and I would say that this is perhaps true at first glance. It is certainly a book that could be dipped into, especially Part B's chapters, depending on a teacher's needs, but to benefit fully and to engage in the content in the spirit in which it is intended, one would likely want to read it from cover-to-cover. An index at the back of the book would be extremely useful, though, to help readers to find or revisit terminology or particular ideas they were unsure of. This would also add value to the book (or extracts of it) if used in training. The style is otherwise accessible, and the layout is clear. For me,

an improvement in appearance might be to make the practical activities stand out on the page a little more, though.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this is a title I'd highly recommend to pre- or in-service TEPP teachers, even those with considerable experience, who may enjoy being challenged in their thinking, as it provides a fresh and inspiring view of English teaching as part of holistically educating young children. Written and contributed to by current experts in the field, it also gives teachers principled practical ideas and classroom resources to inspire children and to help their language development as an integrated part of their overall early development. The reader can also take away some of that inspiration themselves. The title should also be considered by those working in teacher education, such as trainers or professional development co-ordinators, as a source for innovative ideas on session focus, content and processes. It is a well overdue, invaluable addition to literature on TEPP and teacher development, one I could have done with all those years ago in Japan!

**Kate Gregson** has worked in various countries, educational contexts and ELT roles for 25 years, now as freelance YL and training consultant. She also works on materials development and continues to teach adults and YLs of different ages and levels. Her special interests include bilingualism as well as teacher and trainer CPD. You can contact Kate at [gregonkate@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:gregonkate@yahoo.co.uk)

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Simon Pounder



# REVIEWS

## Playbook for Emergency Remote Teaching To 6-10 Year Old Learners

Claire Venables, Rosemere Bard,  
James M. Taylor, Jen Dobson  
(Active English, 2020)

**Reviewed by Simon Pounder**

### Introduction

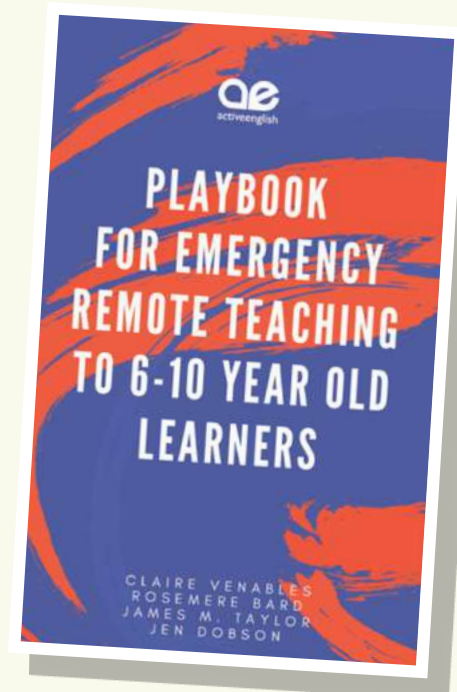
2020 has been a difficult time for many people. Lockdown life and working and learning from home have all meant huge adjustments for everyone. As a teacher and administrator, I have come up against the difficulties that this sudden change and translocation have brought about, whilst searching for solutions that work for everyone involved. The immediate questions have been *What online tools are available? What learning environment can we adopt and adapt?* and most crucially *How does teaching change in the online world?*

*The Playbook for Emergency Remote Teaching to 6-10 Year Old Learners* seeks to address the questions that schools and teachers are grappling with. A *playbook* is defined as a set of rules or suggestions that are considered to be suitable for a particular activity or job, and this resource sets out to do that precisely and concisely in a short 22-page [downloadable PDF](#).

### Book Overview

The *Playbook* is organised in a logical and almost temporal fashion in that it looks first at the considerations that academic staff would initially have to take into account when moving to an online setting. Thus, it starts with an introduction that outlines the challenges that teachers will be facing, but does so in an empathetic and understanding way. In the current atmosphere where we are being micro-managed as to how to lead our lives, even down to the times we can go outside (or not), it is welcoming to see that the authors are putting themselves in the shoes of teachers and administrators and showing such compassion.

The subsequent section looks at the essential elements of online teaching that help the reader



reflect on how primary children will react to being taught online. It poses a series of questions that administrators and school owners should ask themselves before making that jump online. Dilemmas such as what policies and procedures does a school have in place; what training will be given and can reasonably be expected to be given in the current circumstances; and what is the most appropriate virtual learning environment for students. These questions set the context for moving online and are clearly relevant in a publication like this.

There have been a number of disturbing incidents involved online meetings that have had their privacy breached, so for educators, child protection in the online world has to be central to the discussion about moving online.

It sets out a long list of areas to review and quite rightly states "The emergency situation is an opportunity to get your e-safety 'house in order'." Pleasingly it refers to [the child protection guidelines on the YLTSIG website](#) as a starting point as well as providing a list of useful addresses in order to help you find further guidance on online child protection.

With the sudden rush to move online, a reminder of the importance of respecting a child's right to privacy is apposite, as is the call for providing a safe online space to learn and meet with children. As adults who are inured to the privacy recommendations of social media, it is a sharp reminder that children in this age group also have a right to be asked about posting their photos online. For teachers it offers guidance on how to behave in a professional and safe manner considering various points of view, such as the teacher, the child and the parent or guardian.

With all the confusion of moving to web-based lessons, communicating with parents / caregivers is an essential piece of the jigsaw puzzle, and the authors' suggestions on how to best deal with these messages provide a good checklist for schools to follow.

Live online lessons seem to be the way that most schools have chosen to operate but there is a useful section in the *Playbook* that deals with pre-recorded lessons. Public schools have adjusted the timings of lessons which have led to timetable clashes with external providers of English. Recording lessons is a way around this impasse, and the *Playbook* provides a comprehensive checklist of what to look at in this regard.

These are ideas that will make sense to any teacher of this age group, and it is comforting to recognise that teaching online is different but not completely alien. Helpfully, there are a couple of lesson outlines that would guide teachers on how to structure a pre-recorded video lesson. As the *Playbook* explains: "these are not supposed to be used prescriptively but rather as inspiration on how to structure video lessons."

When we move into the realm of delivering live online lessons, the authors provide similarly useful guidelines and strategies. Let's not forget online lessons have been an option for a number of years, and researchers and academics have been investigating the underlying principles of this method and making recommendations based on their findings. Combining these ideas with accepted practice for teaching primary children, has enabled the *Playbook* to present a clear set of strategies for delivering live online lessons. They offer up a lesson framework that is presented side by side with a rationale for each stage of the lesson. This

combination makes their ideas easy to follow and gives teachers a checklist to use when developing their own online lessons.

## Book Evaluation

So, how well have the authors managed to distill the intricacies of online teaching into their *Playbook*? Surprisingly well – which is meant as a compliment! It would be easy to imagine that publishing a resource such as this would be full of shortcomings considering the speed with which it has come out, with the world in upheaval and with so many educators inexperienced in this area. But it is not at all. In fact, it covers all the bases for online teaching from a teacher's point of view and from an administrator's point of view. By setting out the whys and wherefores of getting online as a series of questions it encourages schools to examine their own contexts, which is an approach that works well. A prescriptive set of guidelines would have felt overbearing. It is reflective and supportive, which is just what is needed when teachers are under so much pressure to adapt to the new normal whilst maintaining the standards that all stakeholders expect.

It seems to me unfair to criticize such a well-meaning publication, especially one written at the start of the current crisis when so much was unclear. So, let me say what I would like to see in an updated version of the *Playbook* when the issues around online teaching have crystallised.

Even more practical ideas for lessons would be helpful. The way the suggestions are set out in the current *playbook* works very well, but more ideas would be welcome to teachers. Schools seem to be using a few different video conferencing tools – Zoom, Teams, Google Meet amongst them. A look at the pros and cons of each would be of great help to administrators who are having to choose; similarly, there are different virtual learning environments that schools will be investigating. An overview of the main ones – Seesaw, Google Classroom, and Edmodo – would be helpful as choosing the right platform is a major decision for schools.

Finally, I would like to see greater support given to those teachers who work with younger children. Older children (10-year-olds in this context) are mostly used to working online and manipulating a mouse and keyboard. The younger ones may not yet have the motor skills or literacy to manage typing or downloading files. What solutions can be offered in these cases?

## Conclusion

The question of how we respond to the global crisis has been put to politicians, economists and the general public. In most fields, there is still a shrugging of shoulders and wringing of hands. It is great to see that the authors of this *playbook* have bravely stepped up and offered a way forward for teaching that will allow us to build on the lessons we are learning (and delivering) in lockdown.

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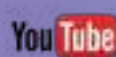
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Marie Delaney



# HOT TOPICS

Teaching children and teenagers in a pandemic – the effects of trauma in ELT

**Marie Delaney**

Across the world, as a result of the Covid19 pandemic, teachers, families and students have been adjusting to a 'new normal', where a constantly changing situation leads to uncertainty and anxiety about the future. Learning is taking place through a mixture of online classes and staged returns to classrooms.

As we begin to emerge from government lockdowns and try to prepare for the next school term, it will be important to be aware of the on-going effects this traumatic event could have on students and teaching staff. As a teacher and educational psychotherapist, I have been working with schools on understanding the effects of trauma on teaching and learning and in this article I discuss some of the principles which might be helpful for teachers of children and teenagers.

## Understanding the meaning and impact of trauma on learning

Covid19 and its repercussions can be considered as a highly traumatic event. If we begin by looking at definitions of trauma, we can see that the Covid19 pandemic belongs firmly in this category. From a psychological perspective, SAMHSA (2014, p.7) defines trauma as:

*Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual wellbeing.*

The global pandemic is life-threatening and has affected people's physical and emotional health. Moreover, the word 'trauma' has its origins in the Greek word for 'wound'. We will have students and indeed teaching staff coming back into school with visible and invisible wounds from their experiences of the pandemic.

We have always had students in our classes who have been affected by traumatic events such as loss, separation, displacement, bereavement, domestic violence, severe physical or mental illness in the family, poverty or having a family member in prison. These students may already have been displaying difficulties in class. However, with Covid19 we have now all experienced a collective traumatic event. As teachers we need to remember this. In our desire to return to school and 'normal' teaching, we need to be careful that we are not dismissing our own and others' experiences and feelings in this time of crisis. Trauma affects the brain and body and this can affect teaching and learning, particularly when students are not able to 'settle to learn',

meaning they need to feel safe and have trust in the teacher in order to learn.

We also need to bear in mind that the effects of trauma might not be immediately obvious or appear in the short-term, they can appear at a later stage, particularly when the environment once again seems safe. We need to be prepared for this as teachers.

And finally, we need to recognise that this trauma has also impacted teachers. Trauma often causes people to feel fearful, helpless and powerless. These feelings can be particularly difficult for teachers to manage because we like to be in control, to make plans and to be able to give advice to our students. As we return to school, it will be vitally important to practise self-care and pay attention to our own wellbeing so that we can best support our students.

### **The effects of trauma on the brain**

As I have said, trauma affects the brain. It can be helpful therefore to understand a little about the different parts of the brain in order to understand the effects of trauma on behaviour and learning. The oldest part of our brain is the brain stem. This is the part of our brain which is on alert for danger and springs into action when something dangerous is perceived in the environment. It triggers the defence mechanisms of fight/flight/freeze. Children and young people who have lived in dangerous, inconsistent, uncertain environments are often easily triggered into the 'fight/flight/freeze' part of their brain. The uncertainty and fear of illness and death caused by the pandemic means that all our brains might be triggered more easily into believing we are unsafe and that we need to fight, run away or disengage. Students may be triggered more easily in the classroom into a fight/flight/freeze response, leading to aggressive or withdrawn behaviour. Triggers can be loud noises, sudden changes in routine, making a mistake in an exercise or the teacher raising their voice. If you have children in your classes who seem to over-react to these small things (or indeed colleagues), they may well be suffering the effects of trauma.

The second part of our brain to evolve was the limbic system, the part of our brain responsible for emotions. Sometimes we are simply overwhelmed by feelings, unable to discuss them or explain what is wrong. It is again impossible to learn if we are flooded by feelings which we cannot name. You may have experienced this yourself during the pandemic, when your moods or emotions changed abruptly and you could not think or take positive action. This flooding of the brain can be paralysing in a learning situation.

The final part of our brain to evolve was the neo-cortex or thinking part of the brain. This is the part of our brain responsible for rational thinking. It does not function well when we sense danger or when we are flooded with feelings. Schools often operate on the assumption that everyone is in their 'thinking brain', whereas experiencing trauma can often cause the other parts of the brain to take over and hijack thinking. As teachers we need to think about how we can help students to get 'back into their thinking brain'. In order to do this we need of course to make sure we know how to remain in or get back into our 'thinking brain'.

### **Understanding toxic stress**

Stressful situations increase cortisol in our bodies and brain. Cortisol is often called the stress hormone. We all need a certain amount of cortisol to motivate ourselves to get up in the morning and to complete challenging tasks. However, when we have too much cortisol it can become toxic stress, making it impossible to focus and concentrate.

Toxic stress affects the executive functioning of the brain. This is the part of our brain responsible for working memory, self-regulation and organisation. When executive function is affected, students may find it difficult to remember instructions, to copy from the board, to recall what they have just read, to motivate themselves to complete a task and to organise their work. If you have found yourself forgetting what you wanted to say or what you were about to do in this lockdown period, you will have experienced how stress can affect your executive function. For students who already find learning stressful, this will be even worse. We need to use teaching techniques which help students to lower their cortisol and help them feel calm enough to learn.

### **Possible signs of trauma which appear in the classroom**

It is important that teachers are aware of and sensitive to the possible signs that a student has been affected by trauma. The signs of trauma are often misread by teachers as disruptive behaviour, as a student who does not care about learning, or who is aggressive or hyperactive. Students are often wrongly labelled and sanctioned, sometimes with sanctions which can lead to re-traumatisation for the student. Signs of trauma in the classroom can include:

- Anxiety, fear and worry about the safety of self and others
- Unexplained changes in behaviour
- Over or under reaction to sudden noises
- Becoming withdrawn and not engaging
- Becoming aggressive and defiant
- Changes in academic performance and motivation
- Increased risk-taking behaviour
- Continually talking and writing about death and destruction

### **What can teachers do?**

Teachers can help. We also know that traumatising events do not have the same effect on everyone. The extent of the traumatisation can depend on the protective factors in a student's life. Protective factors are things which help a person to be more resilient in times of crisis. They include:

- A relationship with at least one caring adult
- Having someone or some way to make sense of the experience, to understand why it happened or is happening
- Having a sense of belonging and connection
- Having responsibility for jobs
- Having empathy
- Having a sense of optimism
- Knowing and acknowledging your strengths

We can see that these are all skills and attitudes which we can easily develop in our classes, whether we are working online or face to face in the classroom.

### **Developing a trauma informed approach**

Identifying the core of people who have experienced trauma can also help us to plan our teaching and our activities. We can then identify their needs, which can include:

**Safety – physical and emotional:** When we have felt very unsafe we need an environment and at least one person who makes us feel safe.

**Predictability/Routine:** When life has been very uncertain and potentially dangerous, we crave routine and predictability to stop us being on high-alert for danger. Wherever possible we need to create a sense of predictability and routine in our classes.

**Connection and belonging:** Feeling connected to others helps us to feel not alone and less fearful.

**Flexibility:** When life is uncertain and unpredictable, we need to know that people can be flexible in their response to changes and new information.

**Choice/control:** When we have felt helpless and powerless, we need to feel that we still have some choice in our life and some control over what happens to us.

**Community:** There is strength and protection in belonging to a community. A class group can be a community. A school can be a community. A community can exist online or in person.

**Authenticity:** We do not want false reassurances in times of crisis. Adults often want to reassure children about the future but we create uncertainty and a lack of trust if we promise things which we cannot be sure of.

**Fun:** Having fun is very important. Through play and fun we release important hormones such as serotonin, 'the happy hormone', and oxytocin 'the cuddle hormone' which we need to feel calm, happy and settled to learn.

## Classroom activities

In order to be trauma informed teachers, we need to plan our lessons and choose our activities based according to these identified needs and protective factors.

### Creating safety

- Create physical safety by designing your classroom in a clear layout with clear visuals.
- If you are still working online, be aware of your school's procedures for reporting any concerns you have about student welfare.
- Involve your students in designing posters and/or photo walls to show the new rules for COVID19.
- Emphasise the positive reasons for needing the new rules and use language which explains the reasons for the rules in class and reassures students that life will not always be like this. You can say 'In order for us all to **feel safe, be able to learn and have fun**, we need to have these rules **for now**'.
- Give students roles and responsibilities with regard to safety. For example, a student can be the safety monitor or a group can be the safety team, another student can be the feelings monitor and help with emotional check-ins.

- ☑ Have regular emotional check-ins and check-outs from class, whether you are working online or in a classroom. Acknowledge that all feelings are valid. It is normal to feel angry, upset, scared. As teachers we often underestimate the value of simply listening and acknowledging how a student is feeling.

### Check-in / check-out activities

One or two word check-in: Ask pupils to share one or two words about how they are feeling or to show their feelings using pictures on a feelings board.

Number check-in: Ask pupils to give a number 1-10 on how they are feeling or to show with their fingers.

Internal weather report: Explain that emotions can be described like weather and ask students what the weather is like inside them, e.g. we can feel like a sunny day inside (happy, excited), like it's raining (sad) or even that it's stormy (angry).

Film or music: Ask students to describe their feelings with a film or music genre or title e.g. comedy (happy), horror (upset), heavy metal (energetic, aggressive).

Check-outs can also be done at the end of a class or session using similar methods to the check-in. They can help students to recognise that things maybe have improved during the time in class.

### Predictability and routine

Have a regular structure to the lesson. Start each lesson with the same kind of activity. Begin by giving a clear order of events, for example 'Today we will do 1... 2... 3...' and at the end of the lesson reinforce what was done by summarising 'So today we did 1... 2... 3...'

- ☑ Make good use of visuals such as icons for the order of the lesson and to emphasise instructions. For example, point to a picture of an ear for 'listen'.
- ☑ Give warnings when an activity is due to finish by counting down from five or displaying a sand timer.
- ☑ Practise in advance safety drills. For example, before a fire drill inform students that a loud bell will be ringing and discuss how they can handle the intense sound by covering their ears.
- ☑ Anticipate unexpected and predictable changes in routines such as a change in teacher or a visitor to the class. Plan how to deal with these changes with your students.
- ☑ Have a closing ritual to your class and create a bridge to the next time you will see the students. This can be as simple as remembering to say 'See you tomorrow'.
- ☑ Use a calendar to show the dates/times of lessons. This will be particularly important if students are only in for certain days of the week or parts of the day.

## Connection and Belonging

- ☑ Encourage students to share stories of kindness and supportive acts in their community which happened during the lockdowns. Make a classroom poster of these stories.
- ☑ Exploit all opportunities to emphasise connections and share experiences, whether online or in the classroom. In a communicative English language class there are many activities which create these opportunities. Think, Pair, Share, where students think on their own, then talk to a partner and then share their ideas is one such routine. Buddy systems and peer support, where students help each other and can acknowledge they have different strengths will help every child see and value their unique place. You can also include activities which encourage students to find out about other people in the group and which develop empathy.

### Activities to develop empathy

Things we have in common: Students in pairs find out 5 things they have in common with each other, e.g. things they both like, or can do.

Our group: Students finish statements about the group and then check if their predictions are correct, e.g. We all.... Some of us..... A few of us.... None of us....

Who can help me?: Students write or say something they would like help with. Other students offer advice and help if they can.

My secret friend: Students all write their name on a piece of paper and the teacher puts the names in a bag. Students pick out a name and do not show it to anyone. This named student is now their 'secret friend'. They must be a good friend to them for the week without making it obvious. For older students this can be called 'Random Acts of Kindness' and the students try to find ways to be kind to their allocated friend.

Our lives: Students stand up in a circle. The teacher reads out statements and students should sit down if the statement is true about them. After each round, students should stand up again. Statements should be things which the teacher thinks will be true for some of the students, such as I like chocolate. I like football. I have more than 2 sisters.

## Choice

- ☑ Wherever possible allow students some choice in how they do activities. That could be the order in which they do the activities or allowing them to choose from a menu of activities on a topic.
- ☑ If your students have to return to schools in smaller groups or 'bubbles', encourage a team ethos. For example, have them choose a team/class name and allocate certain roles to each member of the group.

### **Fun - Relaxation and brain breaks**

Use sensory activities to bring students into the present moment. When we feel anxious and scared it is difficult to stay grounded in the present moment. Anxiety is future focused – which means we start to worry about something in the future which has not happened and find it difficult to enjoy the present. People who have experienced trauma sometimes dissociate from their bodies, becoming restless and hyperactive. The following exercises can help.

### **Breathing exercises**

4/7 breathing: Students sit comfortably. They can close their eyes or look at the floor if closing their eyes does not feel okay. The teacher demonstrates the breathing. Breathe in through the nose for a count of 4, then breathe out through the mouth for a count of 7. Students do this a few times.

Five Finger breathing: This exercise gives students a physical focus as well as breathing. It can be easier for younger students to do. Students sit comfortably. They slowly trace around each finger of one hand with their forefinger from the other hand. As they move their finger up each finger they should breathe in deeply through their nose and when they move their finger downwards they should breathe out deeply through their mouth.

### **Sensory activation exercises**

Students take a drink of water but don't swallow it. They hold the water in their mouth and move it around and notice what it feels like.

The teacher makes a sound which lasts for a few seconds, such as ringing a bell. Students listen and put up their hand when they hear the end of the sound.

Play Kim's game. The teacher puts 7 objects on a tray or on the table. The students have a short amount of time to look and remember what's there before they close their eyes and the teacher takes away an object. Students say which object is missing.

### **Shake it out**

Some students will need to release their energy and will find sitting still to do breathing activities difficult at first. For a quick energy shift – help children 'shake out' their stress. The teacher tells them that they are going to shake gently until all the tense energy in their body is released into the space around them. The students begin by shaking their hands and arms and then allow the body to shake in whatever way it feels comfortable. The teacher asks them to pay attention to the energy moving through their body. They gradually slow down and stop shaking and the teacher asks them to check-in with their body by paying attention to the sensations and how they feel.

### Using the creative arts

English classes and many coursebooks offer opportunities to use stories, art, music, puppets and drama to explore feelings in a safe way. Talking and writing about characters in a story or video allows thoughts and feelings to be discussed in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, which gives distance and emotional safety. This is easier for many students to do than discussing their thoughts and feelings directly. For example, questions about a story such as *'How do you think s/he felt? Who helped them?'*

### Puppet interviews

Puppets can allow students to explore their thoughts and feelings. For example, the 'Alien Puppet Interview'. The teacher tells the students that the puppet is an alien puppet from outer space who does not speak much English. The puppet asks the child to explain certain key words, for example, 'what does sad mean?' 'What makes people sad?' The puppet can also ask the children to explain the rules for staying safe with Covid19.

### Self-care

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, teachers need to practise self-care and self-regulation. We cannot help students to become calm and settled if we are not paying attention to our own well-being. Here are some self-care ideas:

1. Use a planner or a calendar to intentionally schedule 'me time'.
2. In the morning listen to music that inspires and motivates.
3. Write a list of things you're grateful to have in your life and post it somewhere you can see it often. We have a tendency to focus on the negative, so remind yourself of the good things.
4. Share a kind smile with strangers on your way to and from work. Some people may go all day without anyone acknowledging their existence.
5. Start a cycle of encouragement. Tell someone near you what you appreciate about them. They may return the favour when you need it most.
6. At the end of the day, write down 6 good things which happened, even if they seem small.
7. Turn off your phone and step away from the computer for a whole day.
8. Take a few minutes out of your day and watch a funny video online.
9. Have something in your environment which helps you to change your mood e.g. wear a favourite necklace, have a photo on your phone or desk, play or imagine a favourite piece of music.
10. Stop trying to be perfect. We learn from mistakes and we need to be kind to ourselves and accept that we are only human, doing the best we can.

### Conclusion

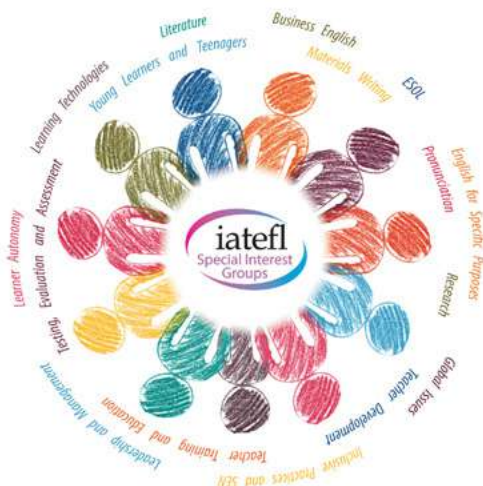
As teachers we cannot predict what school life will be like in the next few months. We may be surprised at how well some students adapt to the 'new normal' and we may also be surprised by the students who find it difficult. We will of course have to view each student as an individual and not assume anything about their situation. However, an understanding of the potential effects of trauma in the classroom should help us in our response to our students returning to school.

**Marie Delaney** is a teacher, educational psychotherapist, trainer and writer. She has taught and trained teachers in many countries across the world. Her publications from Worth Publishing include *Teaching the Unteachable*, *What can I do with the kid who...*, *Attachment for Teachers* and for Oxford University Press *Into the Classroom: SEN*.

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- Please submit a title (max 10 words) and abstract (max 60 words) for your proposed talk in Word to **yltsigevents@iatefl.org** by 15 August 2020
- Speakers who presented at the 2019 YLTSIG Web Conference are not eligible to present in 2020
- Each talk must focus on one age range (early years or primary or lower secondary or upper secondary)
- Speakers are required to attend a rehearsal in early November
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