English Language Teaching in Latin America

Paul Davies, Editor

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN LATIN AMERICA

Edited by
PAUL DAVIES

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INTRODUCTION

Logo from *English Language Teaching in Latin America*

This book contains a collection of articles published in an ELT online magazine or website that I ran as a retirement hobby from August 2018 to July 2020, *English Language Teaching in Latin America*, or *ELTinLA*. The logo of this now discontinued website is at the top of this page.

A selection of the articles that I contributed to *ELTinLA* was published by TESL-EJ in March, 2021, as *Appropriate English Teaching in Latin America*. That book presents a broad review of ELT in Latin America based on over 50 years of experience and research (the

latter mostly from observation and reading), with the assessment that it is achieving very poor results in general, and my view that it could be improved considerably by paying much more attention to the contexts in which English is taught, learned, used and needed in Latin America, that is, with much more context-based and learner-centred ELT.

The other articles in *ELTinLA* complemented my overview (healthily, not always in complete agreement with me) and addressed other aspects of ELT. The authors of those articles included three internationally known ELT experts who are familiar with ELT in Latin America, Jeremy Harmer, Paul Seligson and Richard Rossner, and ELT experts based in Mexico. Sadly, *ELTinLA* failed to get any contributors from elsewhere in Latin America, probably because the competition from national and international ELT journals (more useful for CVs) was too great.

On that last point, *ELTinLA* was very much a *magazine*, not an *academic journal*. It was aimed at ELT practitioners of all kinds, from classroom teachers and coordinators to course designers and materials writers, not mainly academics and researchers, though including them too.

Also, the focus of the magazine was on ELT *specifically* in Latin America, *not* in Europe, Asia, Africa or elsewhere. That meant that, where relevant, articles were expected to take into account the typical contexts, conditions and resources of ELT in Latin America (some very favourable, for example, in quite a lot of private sector ELT and a little public sector ELT, but generally not very favourable and often very unfavourable), the typical needs of most Latin Americans (English more for study and work in their own country, and less for travel and stays abroad than, for example, Europeans), the native languages of most Latin Americans (Spanish and Portuguese), and so on. That contrasted with most writing (in journals and books) and talking (in conferences and teacher training) about ELT today, which is largely globalised, one-size-and-style-fits-all ELT, with only children regularly considered separately, and pays

little, and sometimes almost no, attention to notably different contexts and needs in different countries and regions.

As I say above, some of the articles in this book complement my articles collected in *Appropriate English Teaching in Latin America*, but others address further situations and issues, such as teaching English in a community where an indigenous language is used as much as or more than Spanish, the teaching of reading in English to young children still developing reading skills in their L1, even in the early stages of that development (impossible or ill-advised in most countries around the world), and developing an ELT platform specifically for higher education in Latin America.

One unusual, even peculiar, article of mine is about my development as an ELT textbook writer. Apart from being of possible interest to actual and aspiring textbook writers (and teachers who wonder how the books they use – and reject – get written and published), it illustrates how most ELT textbook writers are based in one country or region but are usually required to write books that can be sold around the world. Few get the opportunity to write specifically for the country or region they know well – and, sadly, those that do (such as writers of national English programme school textbooks) often imitate international books instead of trying to be local context-based and learner-centred. I did get that opportunity a few times, and feel that my co-authors and I made the most of it. Another peculiar article of mine, the last one in this book, is on the politics of ELT, especially in relation to national English programmes.

I give my heartfelt thanks to my co-authors in this book. They – we all – are listed on the following pages in alphabetical order, with brief biodatas.

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Puebla, Mexico

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Paul Davies worked in ELT for 55 years before retiring in 2018. He was a teacher, branch director and teacher trainer, and the Director of Studies, Director General and Director of Operations at The Anglo Mexican Foundation, and then Regional ELT Manager and Senior ELT Consultant at The British Council Mexico. He also worked in several Mexican universities, including the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Universidad Veracruzana, Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala, and finally Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo, where he led a textbook and online platform materials team. He was a founder member and first Parliamentarian of MEXTESOL in 1973, and later Puebla Chapter President and National President. He wrote

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Richard Rossner worked in ELT in Mexico for 10 years, then he was Editor of *ELT Journal* for 6 years. He worked for the Bell Educational Trust in various capacities and was its Chief Executive from 1998 to 2005. From 2006 to 2011 he was Executive Director of EAQUALS, an international association of language centres with its own quality accreditation system. He now represents EAQUALS in various capacities: on a Council of Europe working group, on three EU-funded projects, and as an EAQUALS inspector.

Paul Seligson has been teaching English as a Foreign Language worldwide since 1978. He has worked in classroom teaching, ELT management, teacher training, and materials writing. Over the years, Paul has evolved into a Latin American specialist, living and working for periods in Venezuela, Brazil and Mexico. He is the author or co-author of many EFL textbooks, the latest being the 2020 edition of Richmond's *English ID,* which is designed specifically for Latin America.

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PHOTO FROM MEXTESOL, 1974

Three of the contributors back in 1974, at the first MEXTESOL Convention, in Tampico, Mexico.

From left to right: 1. Paul Davies, 2. Jeremy Harmer, 5. Richard Rossner - for people who won't recognize us.

Very experienced old-timers now – and more fun than they look in that old photo!

THE CEFR AND OTHER MATTERS

RICHARD ROSSNER

(interviewed by Paul Davies)

Paul: You worked in Mexico for about 10 years, didn't you, Richard?

Richard: That's right, in the Anglo, first for two years in Guadalajara, and then in Mexico City.

Paul: And, if I remember correctly, like me, you did a little teaching in public secondary school.

Richard: Yes, for just one year in my case, to get hands-on experience of the context in which many trainees on the Anglo's teacher training courses worked.

Paul: And now, decades later, you know a lot about the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, and its application in countries around the world, apart from in Europe itself. It's had a strong influence on ELT in Mexico and the rest of Latin America, of course. What do you consider to be the most important features of the CEFR?

Richard: That's a tricky question. There are many important features. First, it must be remembered that a key word in the name

CEFR is 'European'. The 30 years' work leading up to the publication of the CEFR was focused on the 'European project' represented by the 47 member-states of the Council of Europe (https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal). Part of this was and is the urgent need to enable people in Europe to communicate and work with one another across barriers of language and culture. So the CEFR wasn't designed as a worldwide project, though it's now referred to outside Europe.

Another important point is that, as the authors state in their introductory 'notes to the user', "We have NOT set out to tell practitioners what to do, or how to do it. We are raising questions, not answering them. It is not for the CEFR to lay down the objectives that users should pursue or the methods they should employ" (Council of Europe 2001, p. xi).

One of the most important things that the CEFR did and still does is to raise questions about the nature of language learning, teaching and assessment. But, unfortunately, these questions and issues have had relatively little impact even in Europe. As you discuss in your editorial, what almost everyone knows about is the system of levels or 'scales of proficiency', and the descriptors which underpin them, which are called 'illustrative' descriptors. The advantage of the A1, A2, B1, etc. levels is that they're language neutral and get away from vague terms such as 'elementary' and 'intermediate', and as the CEFR points out, they can be subdivided in different ways depending on the contexts. For example, within EAQUALS we've developed 'plus' levels, which provides a total of 11 instead of 6 levels, and schools I've inspected have up to three sub-levels leading up to A1, A2, B1, etc.

Paul: How is it, then, that the CEFR levels have become so prominent and the questions raised in the CEFR haven't been more widely discussed?

Richard: Regarding the levels, they filled a void, especially for language testers, who wanted a more solid framework, but also for publishers of course-books. The problem with this is that testers and

course-book publishers may or may not use the levels in a helpful or accurate way. A more sinister recent use of the levels in Europe has been as barriers to immigration: several countries require evidence of proficiency related to CEFR levels, e.g. A2 or B1, as a minimum requirement for residency or citizenship, and even for family reunion. This is, of course, not at all what the Council of Europe, with its focus on human rights, had intended.

Regarding the little attention paid to the CEFR's broader questions about language teaching and assessment, one reason may be the very density of the language in the CEFR's over 250 pages. It's not written in a way that language teachers and teacher trainees can easily absorb. Teacher educators may struggle through parts of it, but most policy makers won't bother, even if it's been translated, and too little work has been done on developing accessible guides to the key elements. However, there's now a good dedicated website at https: //www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-refer-ence-languages/home .

Paul: I'm especially interested in how you see the relevance and application of the CEFR, in Europe itself and around the world. For example, ELT in Sweden and in Portugal, in Romania and in Germany needs to be, has to be, and is, rather different, right?

Richard: That's another complicated question. What do we mean by 'application'? Adopting the level system is one thing but implementing the underlying principles is another. In Europe, public testing bodies have almost all 'adopted' the levels and many are members of ALTE, the Association of Language Testers in Europe. Ministries of education in Europe too are now used to specifying and assessing foreign language learning in terms of CEFR proficiency levels. But, as you imply, there are large differences between national systems in Europe in terms of the age when foreign language learning begins, whether two foreign languages are obligatory (which was recommended as part of the Barcelona agreement in 2002), how many hours of foreign language teaching there is in a school year and, of course, the level of proficiency actually reached

(according to the last survey across 16 countries in 2012, it's surprisingly low).

Paul: What do you mean by 'underlying principles of the CEFR'?

Richard: They're set out briefly in chapter 2 of the CEFR, and then in more detail in chapters 4, 5 and 6, the last of these focusing on learning and teaching, and perhaps more clearly in the new Companion Volume. e.g. pages 26-34. One main principle is that foreign language learning should be 'action-oriented', in other words, whatever happens in the language classroom the outcome should be that students can 'do things' with the language, can use it meaningfully in their current or future lives. Knowledge of the language and its forms and systems should aim to support real-life use of the language, which can be simulated in activities in the classroom. This means students need to learn how to use the language at however limited a level in a variety of situations for a range of communicative purposes. This is why the 'can-do' statements in the various proficiency scales, for example the 'self-assessment scale' (CEFR pages 26-27), describe what people are able to do with the language at different levels in terms of their understanding, speaking and writing.

Another principle which has received more attention in Europe over the last two decades is that students already have a 'language repertoire', consisting of at least their first language and maybe a local variety of that, and in many cases in Europe, with its large numbers of migrants, often in three languages. This language repertoire can help (not hinder) the learning of a foreign language. Of course, there are questions around how exactly this repertoire should be exploited in actual language lessons.

Paul: Right. Of course, that refers to multi-lingual Europe, not Latin America, though some of it is relevant there too. Leaving the CEFR for a moment, what do you remember most about ELT in Mexico compared to all the other ELT you've known?

Richard: You and I were working mainly in the private sector, the Anglo, where courses had to be paid for, but we had regular excur-

sions into the public sector through our teacher training activities. We gave occasional demonstration lessons for the public sector, and I taught one class in a public secondary school for a year.

There were big differences between the two sectors, though I believe the students were equally capable in both. The differences were mainly due to class size – often over 50 in state education, under 30 or 20 in the private sector. Large classes require different classroom management techniques, which I, for one, found it hard to master, and the use of different teaching techniques. Then there were differences in conditions and resources. Not all students in public schools had the textbook. The acoustics in very large classrooms were often poor, and there was often no cassette player or only an inadequate one. Then there was the teachers' own proficiency in English. Through no fault of their own, many teachers in state schools right up to senior high school had low proficiency, to the extent that in our training workshops we had to do some things in Spanish. The same situation existed in some private schools, of course.

Meanwhile, at the Anglo we were able to select Mexican teachers who had already achieved a good or excellent level of English and had successfully completed one of our own training courses. In my experience, these teachers were often able to achieve as good or better results than the few native speakers of English in the Anglo.

In short, the aims in public education needed to be much more modest than in the better part of the private sector. I assume that's still true.

Paul: It is. Coming back to the CEFR, to what extent do you think it's useful for ELT in Mexico, and the rest of Latin America? I'm thinking particularly of ELT in public education and lower end private education, where more than 90% of the population get their English classes – before some of them turn to language schools or institutes!

Richard: Well, as I've said, the CEFR was written for Europe, and countries in Europe refer to it in different ways, in some cases hardly at all. It's been adapted for use elsewhere, such as in Japan, where

intensive research and validation work has been done to create a CEFR-J with the aim of supporting the country's desire to improve English language proficiency, especially among school leavers. This has involved a selective adaptation process because a large majority of Japanese secondary school students are (or were) at proficiency levels between beginner and A2. This diagram shows how CEFR-J has subdivided the CEFR 'basic user' part of the scale. This kind of adaptation of levels and adapting and adding to descriptors is perfectly appropriate, even suggested in the CEFR (chapter 3). But the impact that CEFR-J will have on English language learning in Japan isn't yet clear. As in many countries, much depends on whether state programmes and examinations are adapted accordingly.
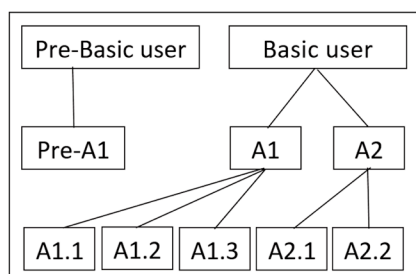
From Fennelly, 2016, p. 114

The implication of this example (and others) is that the CEFR will only be useful in any education system if the various stakeholders (not just the ministry) agree that it can be useful, and if there's extensive consultation and research on the ways in which it can be applied. But it has to be remembered that, to have a meaningful impact, any significant change needs to be 'systemic': if a significant change in the curriculum and orientation of teaching and learning is planned, this can have an impact on syllabuses, course-books, teacher training, including in-service training, examinations, and so on. That's why careful consultation, preparation and pilot studies are so necessary before wholesale changes are implemented – something that ministries of education tend to forget.

Paul: Thank you, Richard. Is there anything you'd like to add, perhaps on a different ELT topic?

Richard: Only that your initiative in setting up ELTinLA can be an exciting and important step towards creating an effective 'community of practice' among ELT professional at all levels within the region. I wish you every success with the project!

Paul: Thanks! I hope ELTinLA will make a significant contribution.

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CHAPTER 2

ELT REALITIES IN LATIN AMERICA, AND… UM…: A MODEST PROPOSAL

JEREMY HARMER

Let's get one thing clear before we get going. I have seen some of the best English teaching of my career in Latin America, and the cast of humane, curious and expert teachers and educators that I regularly meet and interact with (both in person and on the page and online) from Mexico to Chile, from Colombia to Argentina, from Peru to Brazil, is awe-inspiring in its scope, its passion and its accomplishments. My professional life has been extraordinarily enriched by this. I like to think of myself as a slightly 'expert' ELT visitor to Latin America since I worked in Mexico for some years and have been travelling throughout Latin America, interacting with teachers, for a long time since then.

But I am not really an expert, or rather, not a complete one. It is true I have been privileged to walk in the refined air of Cultura institutes (British-centric ELT centres) and bi-national centres (the same but looking towards the USA), in universities and high-end language providers. But my engagement with – and knowledge of – other parts of the ELT system is less complete, though I have continual encounters with many teachers in these sectors and have observed classes.

In what follows, therefore, I am going to set out my understanding of a situation that perturbs me – but an understanding which some may disparage because of my lack of 'deep' knowledge – and suggest some possible ways to improve it. I call this a 'modest proposal' in echo of Jonathan Swift's satirical pamphlet of 1729, where he proposes a solution to the problem of endemic poverty in Ireland – fattening 'excess' children and selling them as meat for rich people in England! Like Swift, I am not completely serious, except in suggesting that we need to think carefully about the problem which concerns many of us.

The problem

In Latin America, and in other countries around the world, English language teaching in schools does not work in general as well as people hope. As Paul Davies has pointed out, all too often a lengthy period of English classes results in a disappointingly poor level of achievement, such that universities receive a lot of students with near-beginner level English, the same students who studied English for many years before they got there. What are the reasons for this? Well, a list could be almost endless, but six reasons that are commonly mentioned are these:

Number of hours. It is almost impossible to really learn English in one, two or three lessons a week, especially where the lessons only last about forty-five minutes each and some time is taken up with classroom administration. As Gary Marcus suggests, in a wonderful account of learning to play a musical instrument, where he compares that with learning a foreign language, "Children who learn a second language in immersion programmes do vastly better than children with more occasional exposure, presumably because it takes the human brain a great deal of exposure to learn anything complicated, and we tend to forget the new stuff if we take too long between practice sessions to consolidate what we've learned." (Marcus 2012: 11).

Class size. Research on the effect of class size is largely inconclusive. We know, however, that the bigger the group the less chance there is for individual attention. This does not mean that students are unable to learn in large groups. The mystery of what happens in an individual's brain does not depend on group size, but we can say with certainty that things usually get more and more chaotic or more and more regimented as the group gets bigger and bigger.

Teacher preparation and expertise. In any course, much depends on the behaviour of the teacher. A lot, therefore, depends on the training, experience and language level of English teachers. Those who know how to operate in a classroom, know English well, and how to teach it, will be much better placed than colleagues who do not know these things. And teachers who have reason to feel satisfied in and with their work situation (working conditions, work load, salary, etc.) are far more likely to approach the task with enthusiasm than those who do not.

Conditions overall. A school that is very poorly resourced will *probably* (but not *necessarily*) find it more difficult to promote good learning than a school that has everything it could ask for.

The students themselves. Since successful learning is realised by the students themselves (and not by the teacher), anything that gets in the way of that is going to have a negative impact. If the students are under-motivated, disadvantaged or seriously preoccupied by other matters, they will be less likely to benefit from instruction (if indeed that is what is called for) than if they are in 'good shape'. Of course, all students go through different stages of contentment, dissatisfaction, etc., but it is not difficult to see how outside circumstances can have an effect on learning of any kind.

Attitudes to foreign language learning. As with every school subject – and learning and education in general – the attitude of others in a student's world (parents, teachers, school principal, friends, etc.) will have a profound influence on their motivation to learn (English in our case).

I have no doubt that all of the above play their part in the success or failure of school (and other) English language learning on a national scale. But there is, it seems to me, a basic flaw in ascribing them more than marginal importance. Many English teachers today are thoroughly expert and bring experience and passion to the classroom, while others are not and do not. But, unless teachers' abilities and knowledge are so poor that they really have nothing to offer students, how significant is the difference between the stronger and the weaker teachers in terms of overall outcomes? If the phenomenon I opened this 'thought piece' with – generally poor results in school ELT – applies across many different situations, there must be more to it than the teachers.

And there must be more to it than conditions and class size too. There is no strong evidence that I know of which shows that well-resourced schools always do better than their less fortunate counterparts, or that class size by itself is a determiner of success. In fact, there are many examples of great things, including learning at school, being achieved in difficult circumstances.

I have omitted so far issues of leadership and management, and the ethos of a school. In particular, a school's attitude to learning and responsibility must have some effect on students' attainment. These things must matter. But they matter across the board – not just for language learning – and success in other subjects often, though not always, is greater than success in English language learning.

I cannot help but think that there are other forces at work, which have the potential to affect foreign language learning negatively – and learning in other subjects too. It is in this respect that what we focus on in our teaching and what we ask our students to give their attention to can (and does) have a significant part to play.

As the situation stands, we are asking children and teenagers to become enthused and motivated by a foreign grammar system which is not intrinsically interesting for them. The main problem English teachers face with most of these young people is the absence of a good, ever-present reason for studying English grammar. Most

school English syllabuses, textbooks and classroom lessons, even now, are demonstrably preoccupied, mainly, with teaching the grammar system and the vocabulary it requires. The 'topics' and 'situations' are just grist for the grammar mill. A lesson about some fictional student or nurse's daily routine, or about the size and importance of different cities, is of little interest to students who are dealing with genuinely novel and interesting content in some other school subjects. And the real topics of those English lessons – the present simple and comparison with adjectives in the examples above – are blatantly obvious, almost insulting the students' intelligence.

You can argue, of course, that everyone knows why English is important in today's world. But that doesn't cut any ice for many young people, especially in communities where there is little or no English around them and where the lives they can realistically aspire to do not have English in them.

Of course, this does not describe all learners. Many are motivated by English and have a desire to learn it, some from an early age, perhaps influenced by their families or because of an interest they have, such as music and songs or computer games. But without such interest, grammar is not in itself a great creator of desire! And unless a need or desire to learn exists, is activated or created, it is difficult to get and retain students' attention in English classes, and without that, they are unlikely to learn much. Attention is what matters, as the singer Sheryl Crow (50 million albums sold) suggested in an interview in The Guardian: in answer to the question "What have you sacrificed for your art?" she replied "My love life. I think *whatever you give your attention to is what thrives*" (2014).

All my working life I have been fascinated by the efforts teachers make to get their students to give real attention to their lessons. They devise 'interesting' or 'fun' situations and activities – games, dialogues, matching tasks and puzzles – to try to engage their students, and when they work, as they often do, we laugh and cheer.

But we may be asking too much of our students, especially of regular school students with many other subjects to worry about, and of ourselves. And perhaps we have got things the wrong way round and put the cart before the horse – in this case, the language before reasons for learning the language. That can result in what Hugh Dellar and Andrew Walkley describe as spending "hours and hours of precious time going over, say, 20-30 grammar structures at any one level"', which is "unfortunately, all we are really doing – in the sense that this repetition of these rules adds nothing extra to students' ability to communicate more fluently" (2016: 24). And it is only when we have decided what structures to teach that we consider what content or 'topics' we might use to 'contextualise' those grammatical items.

A modest proposal

We could put our cart and horse in the proper functional sequence – horse, then cart – by following advocates of CLIL, Content and Language Integrated Learning (see, for example, Ball, Kelly & Clegg 2015). We could choose content as the main focus of what we want to do, and only when we have decided what potentially interesting things we are going to involve students in start to think of the language that might help the students to work with it. That way we might guarantee (as far as that is possible in any school system) that our students will 'give their attention' to what we are asking them to do.

That is indeed the CLIL promise – both getting the students' real attention and educating them – but I want to go a bit beyond that and suggest that if students are unlikely to get anywhere near a fairly accurate command of English (e.g. B1 level) by the time they finish school, given the limitations discussed above, then let's stop pretending that is what we should aim at. Let's stop hoping in vain for 'top European' level fluency and general competence in English when we could do better by using English to excite our students' interest in the world around them, and using their interest in the world around them to help them pick up some English, though

more for comprehension and 'simplified but effective' expression than for grammatical accuracy and fluency.

I do not mean that we should almost abandon English language teaching in schools (though see the postscript to this article). Rather, I am suggesting that we should focus on selecting content – principally about English in the world and in the students' country and region – and get students involved in that, and be realistic about our language level targets. The English that arises as a result of focusing on content would be incidental to our main purpose – general education. Students should learn some routine classroom English, other frequently used phrases, expressions, grammar and vocabulary, song lyrics, and so on. Unfashionable, but sometimes effective, techniques like explanation and translation could be used to help students handle input texts, and to express things they want to say in English. Some of what they are exposed to in this way will stick for many or some students, and some will not. But where students are excited by encountering English in this way (as some surely will be) they can be encouraged to seek additional interesting exposure to English in other ways, e.g. via the Internet.

By giving up our impossible dreams about having almost all students understand, speak and write English quite well by the time they leave school, reducing our targets for English language learning, and focusing mainly on interesting and educational content, we would remove the motivational barrier many students have (English often being their 'least favourite' subject) and accept the reality that is staring us in the face. Students would do interesting and enjoyable things with genuinely engaging content in English, and some English, maybe even a lot, should go into and come out of most students. With no weird grammar-based tests to worry about, their creativity and imagination would have a chance to grow and blossom.

Take, for example, storytelling. When stories, spoken or written, with some familiar context and content are told well, students can enjoy them even if they can't necessarily understand all the language. They can pick up useful and memorable bits of English

more effectively than having lots of grammar examples thrown at them. Why? Because they are engaged in the story, not distressed by the language. Afterwards, they may be able to use some of the words, phrases and sentences that occur, just as many do with the lyrics of English language songs. Such agreeable 'harvesting' of language contrasts with the grim insistence of structure teaching. By helping students understand ideas (and language) in context, and encouraging them (without strict insistence) to try and tell stories themselves, we may end up with only a partial and patchy knowledge of English, but that knowledge, if eagerly acquired, will be better retained, and it may pave the way for more eager acquisition of English by some, perhaps many, students.

That, then, is my mildly Swiftian proposal: Abandon the almost impossible dream of forcibly teaching everyone the English language at school, and instead have them 'fraternise' with English through interesting content and activities. Remove the need to learn grammatical structures and lists, essentially only in order to jump over test obstacles (or hit them and bite the dust), and recognise that there are other more important things to do in our schools! We could well discover that time is better spent that way, and more English actually learnt by more students.

Alternatively, a less modest proposal – and one more grounded in the kind of English teaching that I have been involved in all my professional life – would be to increase English classes to a minimum of five hours a week, reduce class size to a maximum of 30 students, set up a massive teacher development programme, and pay English teachers who graduate from the programme 25% more. That might produce better results too. But teachers of other subjects wouldn't like it!

Postscript

A recent article, drawn to my attention by my friend and colleague Scott Thornbury, suggests that all this worry and frustration may soon be over and foreign language teaching may cease to be part of

the normal school curriculum. The American applied linguist Scott A. Crossley suggests that the enormous strides made in machine translation will soon make it unnecessary to learn other languages. He writes that "Machine translation will not take over the classroom; it will remove the underlying need for FL classrooms" (2018: 548). In such circumstances, trying to engage most students in foreign language learning would be a futile waste of time. No one will need us EFL teachers, syllabuses or course books anymore. We'll soon be rare, endangered or extinct!

You don't believe him? Well, in Nanjing, China in October this year, I met a British teacher who had needed to buy something at an Apple store in that country. As a recent arrival in China, he was unable to speak Chinese. The entire transaction took place with simultaneous translation between him and the store assistant via machine translation software and an audio interface. It was, he said, smooth and problem-free. They could have talked about the weather if they had wanted to. Hmmm…

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CHAPTER 3

FOOD FOR THOUGHT ON GOVERNMENT ENGLISH PROGRAMMES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS

PAUL DAVIES

"[In Sweden a] ten-year 'longitudinal' study was undertaken between 1970 and 1980 to evaluate the relative merits of starting to learn English in either the first year of primary school (seven-year-olds) or the third year. ….. It was decided not to start at the age of seven but to make it universal at the age of nine, a decision which has clearly played a part in making English practically a second national language in Sweden."

Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 1991

My thoughts

The success of universal school ELT in Sweden hasn't been because it was first started at age 9, not 7, but because it was of good quality (it would almost certainly have been equally successful, perhaps a little better, starting at age 7, which it now does). The point is that starting English classes at 6, 7, 8 or 9 (or possibly 10 or 11) makes little difference to the results at the end of compulsory school education, and it should be strongly emphasized that early age ELT is worthwhile only if it's of good quality and in reasonably favourable learning conditions.

It's important also to recognize that Swedish people need and use English much more than people in many other countries: their native language is very little spoken outside Sweden, they travel abroad a lot, Sweden has an advanced economy, etc. Those 'motivating' circumstances almost certainly also played a part in making English practically a second national language in Sweden.

Also, apart from being based on solid research in Swedish schools, not just hypotheses and hope, the initial plan for ELT in all primary schools was probably based on practical considerations and realistic planning. At the start of such a major innovative project, human resources (English teachers and ELT support staff, etc.) and adequate investment can be issues, even for a wealthy country like Sweden: better to start cautiously and with ELT of guaranteed good quality, and to expand if and when the project is clearly successful (and, alternatively, modify the project if a satisfactory level of success is not achieved).

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"El inicio del estudio de la primera lengua extranjera [siendo el inglés la lengua extranjera considerada preferente] difiere entre las Administraciones educativas. En general tiene lugar en el segundo ciclo de Educación Infantil de forma prescriptiva o recomendada. Se contemplan tres situaciones diferentes:

La introducción de una lengua extranjera se hace en el primer curso del segundo ciclo de Educación Infantil.

Se inicia de manera obligatoria en el segundo curso del segundo ciclo de Educación Infantil.

Aunque existe la opción de introducir el estudio de la primera lengua extranjera en el segundo ciclo de la Educación Infantil, la obligatoriedad llega en la Educación Primaria."

Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, España, 2012

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My thoughts

The teaching of English starts earlier in Spain than in Sweden (though there the learning of English usually begins in the family now, not at school), but the results are nowhere near as good. Under a quarter of adult Spaniards speak English compared with almost all adult Swedes (Eurobarometer). This may in large part be due to the different quality and effectiveness of ELT in Spanish and Swedish schools, but other factors are likely to be involved too. For example, Spanish is a major international language, so native speakers of Spanish need English far less than native speakers of Swedish (or Dutch, Finnish, Greek, Hungarian, etc.).

It's interesting that the Spanish Ministerio de Educación complements school ELT (and the teaching of some other languages at school) with Escuelas Oficiales de Idiomas for adults, implicitly recognizing that many adults find their school English inadequate, or that they need another language, such as Arabic or Chinese.

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"El Programa Nacional de Ingles (PRONI) es un programa presupuestario de modalidad "S", sujeto a Reglas de Operación (ROP) y bajo la responsabilidad de la Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP). Surge a partir de la necesidad de contar con escuelas públicas de educación básica que impartan la enseñanza del inglés como segunda lengua y justifica su creación en la relevancia del saber inglés como una ventaja competitiva que les permite a los estudiantes tener acceso a más información, mejorar sus oportunidades profesionales y laborales, así como su movilidad social. ….. El PRONI no evalúa el aprendizaje del idioma inglés por parte de los alumnos. Esto es fundamental debido a que constituiría la prueba última que el programa es efectivo."

Secretaría de Educación Pública, México, 2017

My thoughts

The unavoidable bureaucracy and rigidity of a large, centralized national programme in a large country is apparent in the first sentence above. The good intentions are apparent in the second sentence. And, stated at the end, is one of the many weaknesses of PRONI (and Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica, PNIEB before it, which began the teaching of English from the last year of Pre-school in 2009).

However, no official evaluation is needed to confirm that the greatest failing of PNIEB-PRONI is the serious inadequacy of learning results. They're reflected in the level of English of students entering institutions of higher education: most still go into beginner or elementary common core English, and there are various studies showing the generally low level of English of students entering higher education. They're also reflected in estimates of the adult population that "speaks English" (which may mean B1+ or only A2+ level): estimates range between 5% and 15%, with Consulta Mitofsky giving 11.6% in 2013. And they're even reflected in 'ordinary' Mexicans around us – their opinions on school ELT, and their English, or lack of. It isn't very different in most of Latin America.

And there has been some independent research into PRONI, most of it qualitative (e.g. teachers' perceptions), but at least two evaluating learning results. Aquino, Núñez and Corona (2017) tested a sample of 629 3rd year Secundaria students across 28 schools in the Municipio de Nezahualcóyotl (attached to the conurbation of Mexico City). The results indicated that 97.3% were at starter level, 1.1% at A1 level, 0.3% at A2 level, and 1.3% at B1 level (the end of Secundaria target in PRONI). Aquino et al also cite Székely et al (2015), who found only 3% of their sample to be at B1 level. It's safe to say that all the students who were at B1 and most at A2 in both studies got there through special circumstances (time in the USA, extra-curricular classes), not through PRONI school English classes.

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PREESCOLAR	PRIMARIA						SECUNDARIA		
CICLO 1 (SENSIBILIZACIÓN)	CICLO 2 (A1)		CICLO 3 (A2)				CICLO 4 (B1)		
3°	1°	2°	3°	4°	5°	6°	1°	2°	3°

Secretaría de Educación Pública, México, 2017

My thoughts

Yes, those (if you can see them, beside each 'ciclo') are the target levels in PRONI: A1 for the end of 4th year of Primaria, A2 for the end 6th year of Primaria, and B1 for the end of Secundaria (lower secondary), which was re-confirmed in the Diario Oficial on March 5, 2019. And B2, presumably, at the end of Bachillerato (upper secondary), though that's not clear in official documents from different authorities and systems, different ones giving the starting point for upper secondary English as A1, A2 and B1.

The actual English syllabuses in that same document are highly 'functional', i.e. specifying and elaborating on communicative functions (and 'social practices' – of native speakers, presumably), and indicating notions (past, present, future, comparison, etc.) and lexico-grammar only in the margin, as it were. For 1st year Secundaria the following sample language is given: *You used to be…, didn't you? The place they went to… We really should go there. I'm looking forward to… They watched… / They were watching… / They had watched… What will happen if…? If we study we will…* real B1 stuff already in first year Secundaria. Go for it! Well, perhaps not, remembering that Aquino et al found that 97.3% of their sample of **third** year Secundaria students were at starter level.

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And, the last dish for now (you must be feeling quite full already):

What should English teachers *__really do__* in their classes in primary, lower secondary (and then upper secondary schools), with the PRONI syllabuses so out of this world for most of them?

Should PRONI be cut back to start at 4th year primary school (like the initial, immensely successful, Swedish universal school English plan), and made more realistic (less wildly over-optimistic) in its targets?

Should the SEP consider government language centres, some based in schools in the afternoon and evening, for children wanting more than school English, and adults needing English, having failed to learn it at school, or other languages (like in Spain)? - Me, 2021

Your thoughts
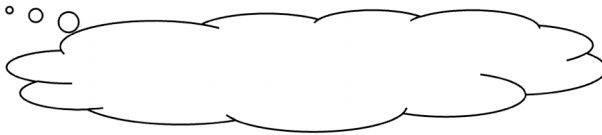
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TEACHING ENGLISH IN MEXICAN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS

ANGELA LLANAS

While English has been part of the official curriculum in all Mexican public secondary schools for over 50 years, English in public primary schools is a comparatively new venture. From 1992, more and more states started primary school English projects, with different programmes, until the federal educational authorities (SEP) began to replace them with the Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica (PNIEB) in 2009. It started from the last year of pre-school through to the end of lower secondary school, covering 10 school years. In 2017 PNIEB was adapted into the Programa Nacional de Inglés (PRONI), with A2 as the target level for the end of primary and B1 for the end lower secondary.

From the start, especially in an enormous, varied, developing country like Mexico, there were bound to be many problems attached to teaching English in public primary schools, planning to eventually reach all children in all schools sometime in the future. The major problems that continue today include:

- There are not enough trained and competent English teachers, especially for children aged between about 5 and 11.
- As a consequence, and in order to keep the expansion of

PNIEB-PRONI going, schools have had to improvise English teachers by employing people who know some English but aren't trained teachers, and others who are trained children's teachers but know little or no English – and have to 'learn' lessons themselves before they can 'teach' them!

- Conditions are usually less favourable in public schools than in private ones: larger groups, fewer class hours of English, fewer members of staff who know English, etc.
- Most children in public schools don't have the favourable home and extended environment for learning English that many, if not most, private school children do (cable TV, Internet, vacations in international resorts like Cancún or in the USA or elsewhere abroad, etc.), nor the example of parents and relatives who know English, perhaps using it in professional or skilled jobs or studying to improve it in a language school.

Leaving such issues aside for a moment, I must say that a great aspect of PRONI is that it asserts that all children, whatever their background and circumstances may be, should be given similar opportunities in life, and around 90% of them attend public schools (that is, PRONI schools), not private ones. English is in PRONI because it can open up opportunities for teenagers and young adults, especially those who go on to higher education or vocational training, and then to professional or skilled work.

The billion dollar question is whether English classes through 10 years of basic education, from the last year of pre-school, plus three more years of English in upper secondary (Prepa), is the best way to provide English to those teenagers and young adults who actually need it, or whether fewer years of higher quality English classes would be better. But that isn't the focus of this article, so I'll just leave it for you to think about, and I'll move on to my main topic: *Teaching English in Mexican public primary schools*.

PRONI primary school syllabuses

The coverage of English language and communicative competence is quite challenging, A1 by the end of 4th year primary and A2 by the end of 6th year, particularly in typical public primary school conditions. However, the methodological guidelines in the syllabuses and material in the textbooks have many positive features:

- The general focus is on effective communication, not full grammar and grammatical accuracy, for example, "A hamburger, please" rather than "I would like to have a hamburger", and expressions for common social practices.
- Students are to be exposed to English and encouraged to work out as much as they can for themselves, which develops their learning abilities. As a children's (and adults') teacher, I love that – I want the kids to show me when they've learnt some English so that I can congratulate them!
- PRONI shows the children other cultures through stories from other countries. That's great at the primary level because all children love stories! The children are to be encouraged to interact with texts, both through reading them and talking about them, so they subconsciously pick up the language.
- At the end of every PRONI unit there's a project, which is carefully built up throughout the unit, so it isn't difficult. Children can show these projects to their parents, grandparents and friends, and feel rightly proud of their efforts.
- The textbooks, which are free, are produced by publishers working closely with the SEP, and they contain material for all the above. They also provide songs and games, which primary children like, and beautifully illustrated readers with vibrant colours, which really appeal to children. Using the textbooks and readers, teachers won't be lost.

That all sounds just wonderful, but don't forget the problems mentioned above. One of them is the large classes that are common in public primaries, especially urban ones. PRONI encourages teachers to divide classes up and work in pairs and groups, but a big warning here! Most teachers, and especially ones with little experience, find group work hard to control, and this is particularly true at primary level, because the kids tend to get over-excited. My advice is to do group work in short periods of just a few minutes, and make sure what the kids are doing is both easy and fun for them!

Another problem area you might find is the attitudes of parents, older siblings and others, which may rub off onto the children. Older people may be negative about English because of their experiences when they were in secondary school (they most likely didn't have English classes in primary), and because of migration experiences in the USA, their own or what they've heard and read about. I've been astounded at the comments very small children have made to me about problems at the Mexican-American border and the current President of the USA, obviously coming originally from their parents and other older people. That makes some kids feel they don't want to learn English.

In short, though PRONI might work well in some public primary schools, or some teachers' classrooms, and in many private schools, the A1 by end of 4th year and A2 by end of 6th year targets are challenging and the problems are considerable in most public schools.

PRONI primary school students

A massive advantage of teaching in primary schools, including public ones, is that kids at that age range are motivated by fun and enjoyment! They're usually happy to learn an expanding repertoire of songs and sing them again every now and then, to act out songs and stories they've learnt, to do physical activities (touching feet, noses, etc., pointing at windows, doors, etc., running, jumping, hopping around the school yard, etc.) and games and do them again every now and then. Many of the activities in the PRONI syllabuses

and textbooks are potentially fun activities. But, of course, for the fun (and not so fun) activities to work, teachers have to establish an affectionate relationship with the children and show that they are having fun with them and are enthusiastic about the activities. That will make all the difference with PRONI!

But I said "at that age **range**" above, and the differences between teaching children of 6-7 years old and almost-teenagers of 11-12, and those in between, must be understood. Like all primary school teachers, English teachers should have a fair understanding of child psychology and development. The PRONI syllabuses and textbooks reflect them, but teachers have to make the happy childlike atmosphere and English activities of the first years of primary school happen, and the more mature ones of the last years.

Again, that doesn't make the problems mentioned at the beginning of this article, and in the section above, disappear, but it can all help.

PRONI primary English teachers in different schools

In the first part of this article I mentioned 3 types of people who teach English in PRONI primary:

A Trained primary school English teachers.

B People who speak English, perhaps very well, but have no teacher training of any kind

C Trained primary school teachers with little or no English

There are other possibilities, for example, trained English teachers with no primary school teacher training and trained primary school teachers with no ELT training but good English. However, I'll stick to A-B-C above to illustrate ways of dealing with teaching issues.

Those different types of teacher may find themselves in different types of school, for example, a large city school benefitting from special circumstances (for example, in a well-off area where some children take extra English classes, or in a well-funded Centro Esco-

lar), a large city school in a poor area, a small town school, a rural school. I'll now consider teachers type A-B-C in different types of school, addressing you, the reader, as if you were one of those teachers (which you may be).

Teacher type A: Trained primary school English teachers

If you're in one of the few schools with conditions that might permit you to help your students achieve the PRONI targets (A1 by end of 4th year, A2 by end of 6th years) go for it! And if you get there with most, or even about half, of your pupils, you (and probably your fellow English teachers and your school) deserve a gold cup and deafening applause – but your pupils' success will probably be enough for you! If you're in a school that clearly doesn't permit that, be equally enthusiastic, but realistic. That might mean, for example, asking for permission to use the A1 textbooks over all 6 years, and not attempt A2. Even then, if you get to A1 by end of 6th year with most, or many, students, you should be congratulated because students entering public lower secondary school with A1 level English is very rare today – you'll be helping to create a better tomorrow! If you're in a school where even that isn't possible, it doesn't mean that nothing is possible. Keep smiling, do your best, and make your pupils' enjoyment of your English classes your priority.

Teacher type B: People who speak English, perhaps very well, but have no teacher training of any kind

The suggestions above for Teacher type A apply equally to you but, in addition, you'll have a lot to learn about teaching English and about teaching primary school children of different ages. You could do some of the latter by visiting, with permission, general primary teachers who are popular with their pupils and respected by the school principal. Focus on the children, the activities (and changes of activity), and how the teacher manages them and relates to the children. For the ELT side, the PRONI syllabuses and textbooks can help you a lot, and if there are any trained English teachers in the school, try to visit their classes.

Teacher type C: Trained primary school teachers with little or no English

Again, the suggestions for Teacher type A apply equally to you. Your big challenges will be both the English language and ELT methodology. The PRONI syllabuses and textbooks can help you a lot with both – keep close to the textbooks. If there are any trained English teachers in the school, try to visit their classes. And, if you'll probably be giving English classes for the foreseeable future (and perhaps enjoying it more and more), begin to convert yourself into an English teacher by taking English classes (for example, if there's an autonomous university near you, go to its Centro de Lenguas). If you understood most of this paragraph, you're well on your way!

To conclude, let me say that I hear a lot of negative comments about the PRONI programme, and I think some of them are fair, but many of them aren't. As I go around visiting public primary schools, children are becoming more and more eager to run up to me and speak to me in English! That didn't happen at all some years ago! I think it's a great sign. Yes, they make mistakes, but I can usually understand them. They're communicating in English – voluntarily! And let's face it, I'm British and I still make lots of mistakes in Spanish after decades in Mexico, and everyone seems to understand me – and actually enjoy my Spanish! Some public primary school children seem to be losing their fear of English, and just that **has to be a good thing**! So, if you're teaching PRONI primary school English, keep up the good work to the best of your ability, whatever the circumstances!

CHAPTER 5

READING IS FUN FOR YOUNG CHILDREN (IN LATIN AMERICA, ANYWAY)

ANGELA LLANAS

It really is, and you'd better believe it, because if ***you*** don't think it's fun, chances are that the children you're teaching won't find it fun with you. And if they don't think it's fun they may not master it. But they will master it, of course, because reading is closely allied to stories, and ***all*** children love stories!

Reading letters of the alphabet

More and more children in Latin America are starting to read in English at earlier and earlier ages, because many start learning English these days at kindergarten. This means that they're learning to read in English at virtually the same time as they're learning to read in their mother tongue. Thankfully, this is not too big a problem as they're working with basically the same alphabets.

So let's get started. The first step in reading is to recognise letters and relate them to sounds. Way back, the ancient Egyptians saw this as a problem, and they invented hieroglyphics, a system of writing in which sounds (and some syllables and words) were represented by pictures, and therefore easy to read. And not only ***easy*** to read, but ***fun*** to read, too.
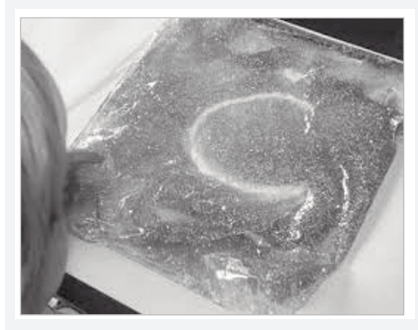
Well, when teaching young children to read we can do something similar. All you need is hair gel and zip-up plastic bags. Write a letter on the board, point to it and say it. Then get the children to write the letter on their gel-filled bags and read it out loud – much more fun and much more memorable than just reading the letter from the board.

Reading words

The next step in reading is to join the letters together to make words. This is always a problem because beginner readers tend to read the letters individually, and not run them together (c…a…t). They find it difficult to blend the sounds of letters into complete words. Yet again, we can adapt hieroglyphics to the job in hand. Give them words to read, but give them pictures, too.

dog

cat

pig

That makes it easy for children to say the written words successfully. They look at the pictures and 'read' the words. No problem! Of course, we all know that they're relying heavily on the pictures. But after they've read this way several times, give them the words without the pictures. You'll soon see that they can now read them perfectly, and they'll no longer be reading each letter separately. They'll be seeing the words as a whole, conceptually, as if they were the pictures they represent!

Reading simple sentences

I   like   the   cat.

After working with individual words, the next step is to put a few simple words together to make a sentence. Stick to the words the children already know, some from oral activities. Help them read the sentence word by word by getting them to point at the words as they read them.

After that the children will be able to read 'I like the dog', 'I like the pig' and so on, with or without pictures. Yes, they'll be ***reading sentences***, and they'll deserve a lot of praise from the teacher! Remember little children like to please their teacher! Don't forget to be generous with your praise!

Moving along

As the children gradually get older it's important to gradually up the reading challenge, of course. They won't learn to read at higher levels simply because they want to please their teacher. They must have a reason to want to read. The reading material should be more and more meaningful, about fun things that young children can relate to. And don't abandon pictures! There's a reason why all children's early reading books have pictures! Pictures are an important aid to comprehension. Children will find no point in reading if they don't understand what they're reading about. Look at the following simple example.
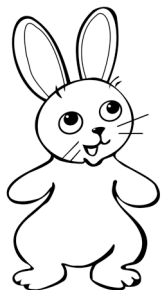
Bunny is very hungry. Yummy!
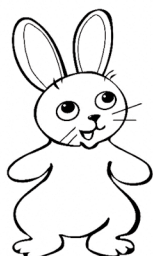
Bunny likes flowers. Yummy!
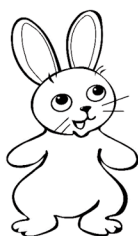
Bunny likes carrots. Yummy!

The teacher should read aloud first, all the time making sure that the children have time to look at the pictures, and that they're running a finger along under the words as they listen to them. Stop after each part of the story for the children to act out the meaning: hopping like rabbits, rubbing their tummies, eating flowers, and so on. Active participation is what makes the story real fun! Then the children read the story aloud in chorus. Reading together builds up their confidence. Notice the importance of repetition. Once the children have read the first page or two of the story they can read the rest of the story easily – Bunny likes cabbage. Bunny likes apples. etc. – because they have the pictures and the written words to help them, and it's fun guessing a bit.

The great thing with this approach is that all the children in the group will be successful. When children are successful they feel good! They enjoy reading! They want to read more! That's when you move onto the next step. Cover the pictures and get the children

to read the story again. With so much previous practice, they'll be able to do it, and that will make them feel like reading champions! Especially if you tell them they're reading champions!

Stories and reading

We've already agreed that all children love stories, right? Stories are part of our culture as we grow up! But what types of stories are best for teaching children to read in English?

Well, you won't go far wrong if you choose simplified stories the children already know in their own language. If you can't find what you're looking for, you can easily simplify well-known stories your-self, and download pictures from the internet to go with them. Then all you have to do is run off copies for all the children in your class. Remember to keep the sentences short and write them in fairly large letters when you're teaching young children to read.

Why do these stories work so well? Precisely because the children already know what the story is about, so they can concentrate fully on reading the written words, and not have to think too much about the meaning at the same time.

This is Little Red Riding Hood.

She is in the forest.

Oh no! Look! It's the Big Bad Wolf!

The children look at the pictures first and talk about what they can see. Then they read the sentences. Nobody feels lost! And children love to hear and read the same stories again and again.

Tricky words

'Tricky words' are ones that don't look like how they sound. There are many in English, including very common ones, and not many in Spanish. The sentences above have some very common 'tricky words' in them. They're words teachers tend not to focus on very much when teaching, but which appear often in all stories. Young children, including British and American ones, tend to struggle with them.

The very common 'tricky words' in the story above are:

- *this*, tricky because of the sound for 'th' (which doesn't even exist in Latin American Spanish).

- *she*, tricky because of the sound for 'sh' (which is rare in Spanish, perhaps occurring only in some Mexican indigenous names, like Xola and Xel-Há).

- *the*, tricky because of the *different* sound for 'th' (again not existing in Latin American Spanish).

How can we help children learn to read 'tricky words'? First write the ones that come up repeatedly on flashcards, and find a couple of minutes every class to hold them up, so that the children can practise reading them. Other very common 'tricky words' for young learners include *he*, *we*, *that*, *these*, *those*, *was*, *do* and *does*. When the children are quite good at recognizing the words on the flashcards, you can make little domino pieces or memory cards for the children to read and match. Remember games are fun, so that's one way to go!

Comprehension

It's important that children at all stages of reading should be given the chance to show the teacher that they understand what they're reading. Traditionally, this has usually meant some kind of formal exercise (true and false statements, questions, fill-in sentences, etc.). With young children learning to read in a foreign language, we should make it more fun than that!

- Almost from the very beginning children can read and then act out what they have read, like miming the story, as in 'The Hungry Bunny' example.
- Then very soon they can move on to acting out and telling stories using their own words. Making puppets to act out and tell the stories they've read can be a lot of fun.

Stories with rhyme are great for early learners. The teacher should read the story out loud, while the children follow the words in their books or on a worksheet. Pause for them to guess the rhyming words.

Here's an example. The basic story is Rapunzel, but adapted for our purposes.

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel! Let down your hair!"

Unfortunately, the tower is so high that Rapunzel can't hear, so she throws down all the wrong things. It's all very irritating for the prince!

"I said hair! I didn't say **bear**!"

"I said hair. I didn't say ………!"

"I said hair. I didn't say ………!"

In the end the prince's horse is very angry! "You said hair!
Leave the silly girl up …….!"

The children listen to and read the story, and shout out the missing words. It's easy and fun because the missing words all rhyme! And it proves that they're understanding what they're listening to and reading!

As young readers get older

As children get older you have to give them older-type challenges. Here's one suggestion for older children. All the children should have a story exercise book, and they can write their own in it. Once a week give each child a picture. It could be a photograph, a picture cut out of coloured magazine, or a picture from the internet, like the very angry looking tree on the right. The children have to stick the picture they receive into their story exercise book. Then they have to write a short story that they invent using the picture they received to give them ideas.

Below is a story written by a nine-year-old boy about that angry or frightening looking tree, with his own drawings added.

So where does reading come in? Easy! When all the children have finished writing their stories, a story-reading session follows. Every child has to read his or her story to the rest of the class!
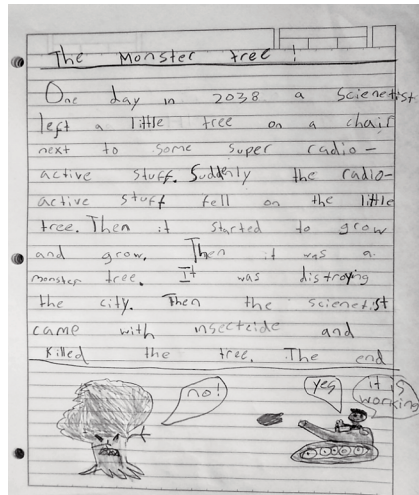
Round Up

Teaching reading can be a lot of fun for children, and for teachers as well. Not only **can** it be, it **must** be. By teaching children how to read you are opening up all sorts of exciting possibilities for them. Reading is a vital skill in life, and reading in English is now important for more and more people. So make reading a really important part of your English class. Be varied and imaginative in your approach – **and have lots of fun!**

CHAPTER 6

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ELT IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE STATE OF TLAXCALA

PAUL DAVIES AND ROSALINA DOMÍNGUEZ

[A previous version of this article was published in *Appropriate English Teaching for Latin America* (TESL-EJ 2021). The version is included here to accompany the closely related article by Lengeling and Wilson, which follows this.]

Background

It's generally recognised that the results of ELT in Mexican public secondary schools, and many private ones, are very poor. Evidence of poor results exists in estimates of adult Mexicans who speak English, and the level of English of students entering public universities, and some private ones. Most enter still at or little above beginner level, even with 3 years of upper secondary (Prepa) English courses in addition to the 3 years of (lower) secondary courses. Most universities have 'common core' English courses from beginner to A2 level (higher in some cases), and most students go into the beginner course – they start studying English from scratch again, for the third time, or even the fourth if they had English in primary school.

There are many possible negative factors that may contribute to these poor results in secondary schools (and other levels of schooling

below higher education). They may include teachers without adequate English and/or training, inappropriate syllabuses and text-books, excessively large groups, insufficient time for English courses, poor school conditions for learning English, and low expectations (e.g. because very few adults in the school and the children's environments have successfully learnt English at school).

We thought it would be interesting and useful to explore those and other factors as perceived by English teachers in their own schools, and we invited graduates from the 4-year degree course in ELT of the Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala, Mexico (where Rosalina works and Paul has worked) who are now teaching in a public secondary school to answer a questionnaire. As graduates from an ELT degree, the teachers could be discounted as one of the negative factors, more likely being an above-average positive factor. Thirty-three teachers responded. This article reports and discusses the data and indications in their answers.

The questionnaire, the answers, and some comments

We were very aware of the risk of personal feelings affecting the teachers' answers – the natural tendency to see things you like (or wish to feel good about) more positively than they are and to see things you don't like more negatively – and also of the risk that busy teachers might answer the questionnaire too hastily for accuracy. We tried to make the teachers also aware of these risks through this introductory comment: "The questions refer to 'your perception' of factors related to ELT in your school, but we need your answers to be as objective and true as possible, so please think carefully about each one. Thank you again." The generally high degree of agreement among the teachers suggests that they took the comment to heart, and real differences among the schools probably account for most of the markedly contrasting answers

The questionnaire contained 16 questions, two of which were discounted in the analysis, leaving the 14 given below. Here they are, with the number of teachers for each option in **bold**, comments on the question, and comments on the answers.

1 *Approximately what percentage of students* **enter** *your school with some English (from primary school, etc.)?*

0% **x3** *10%* **x17** *20%* **x4** *30%* **x2** *40%* **x3** *50%* **x1** *60%* **x1** *70%* **x2** *80%* **x0** *90%* **x0** *100%* **x0**

Comments: Most public primary schools now have at least some curricular English courses, and where many students have had English in primary, results in secondary should be better. Among our 33 teachers, 20 have only 0-10% of students who've had English in primary, though 4 have over 50%.

2 *Do you have students in your classes who speak English quite well because they have lived in the USA or Canada?*

Always **x0** *Often* **x0** *Sometimes* **x2** *Very occasionally* **x15** *Never* **x16**

Comments: There are many people in Tlaxcala State who've lived in the USA (usually 'undocumented') and have returned, speaking some English, sometimes quite good English. They include some children and teenagers. Where there are many in a school, it might help the English teachers' efforts. Among our 33 teachers, none usually have such students.

3 *How would you characterize the motivation for learning English of most* **3rd year** *students in your school?*

Very high **x2** *High* **x3** *Medium* **x16** *Low* **x9** *Very low* **x3**

Comments: Motivation is generally considered an important or even essential factor in foreign language learning, and success or failure tend to have an impact on it, success in an endeavour lifting or sustaining motivation, and failure depressing it. Among our 33 teachers, most (16) feel that their students' experience of English classes in 1st and 2nd year hasn't impacted on their motivation much, either way. The other 17 teachers go in both directions, but more (12 against 5) feel their students have low motivation. It may be much the same with most school subjects, except when specific students are good at them, instinctively like them, or have very moti-

vating teachers: all compulsory school subjects may be just that for many students – compulsory.

4 What expectation of leaving school speaking English fairly well do you think most **1st year** students have?

Very low **x5** *Low* **x14** *Medium* **x11** *High* **x3** *Very high* **x0**

Comments: Expectation of success or failure often has an impact on motivation, and probably few students entering secondary school see many examples of success in learning English at school among their parents, older siblings, relatives, acquaintances, or school staff. That seems to be what most of our 33 teachers generally perceive, with most (19) answering low or very low, and only 3 above medium.

5 What is student participation in your classes like in general?

Very good **x1** *Good* **x17** *So-so* **x12** *Poor* **x1** *Very poor* **x2**

Comments: Most of our 33 teachers consider participation to be good, and only 3 consider it to be poor or very poor. That generally positive perception may reflect the good work of the teachers (possibly in spite of the 'less good' work of other teachers in the school and the school environment) and the resilience of most Mexican teenagers!

6 Approximately how many **effective** hours of English class do students receive per year?

Under 80 **x1** *81-90* **x4** *91-100* **x11** *101-110* **x8** *111-120* **x3** *Over 120* **x6**

Comments: The norm here was set by the Secretaría de Educación Pública: "Given that a school term has 200 working days (40 weeks), the three weekly sessions (45-50 minutes each) make a total of 90 to 100 hours of study per grade" (SEP 2005). 28 of our 33 teachers estimate over 90 hours, with only 5 estimating under that.

7 How many students are there in your English classes?

Under 25 **x2** *25-30* **x8** *31-40* **x21** *41-50* **x2** *Over 50* **x0**

Comments: Group size in Mexican public secondary schools varies greatly and can be over well 50, especially in large cities, with smaller groups common in small towns and rural areas. In the schools of our 33 teachers, 31 have groups of under 41, and 10 of those groups are under 31. Note that Tlaxcala State is largely rural and has no large cities.

8 How many English teachers are there in your school?

Only you **x1** *2-3* **x18** *4-6* **x14** *Over 6* **x0**(Comments below question 9)

9If there are 2+ English teachers, how much ELT coordination or collaboration is there among them?

A lot **x4** *Some* **x14** *A little* **x10** *Virtually none* **x5**

Comments on 8 and 9: The lack of coordination among English teachers in a school, with different teachers doing different things (e.g. some establishing English as the main classroom language and others not), can have a substantial negative impact on the courses and the overall results. Only one of our 33 teachers is working alone, and 14 are working with 3 or more other teachers. Only 4 report a lot of ELT coordination and 15 report little or none.

10 In your opinion, how appropriate for the students in your school are the English syllabuses and textbooks?

Not at all appropriate **x14** *Not very appropriate* **x9** *Fairly appropriate* **x8** *Perfectly appropriate* **x2**

Comments: The feeling of 23 of our 33 teachers is that the syllabuses and textbooks aren't really suitable for the students, with only 2 of them fully satisfied. Lines of thought and research leading out of that might be 'Why not?', and 'What kind of syllabuses and textbooks would be suitable for public secondary school students in small city and rural central Mexico?'.

11 How well-supported is your ELT, e.g. school CD player, computer projector, etc.?

Not at all **x9** *So-so* **x18** *A lot* **x6**

Comments: Technology and aids for ELT, and other subjects, in Mexican public schools have been improving, but only 6 of our 33 teachers are happy with the situation in their schools, and 9 are very unhappy, presumably having to take their own CD player, etc., to their classes.

12 To your knowledge, apart from English teachers, how many members of the school staff have B1+ level English?

Over 10 **x1** *6-10* **x0** *3-5* **x4** *1-2* **x14** *None* **x14**

Comments: Where many members of staff in a school speak English, especially if the school principal is one of them, it's probable that students are more likely to learn the language, like in bilingual schools. Supposedly all the members of staff studied English at school, and if they didn't learn it they're poor examples for the students. Close to half our 33 teachers work in schools where only the English teachers know English, and most of the rest where only 1 or 2 other members of staff do.

13 To your knowledge, how many students in your school have English speaking parents or relatives?

Many **x0** *Some* **x3** *A few* **x19** *Almost none* **x7** *None* **x4**

Comments: This is yet another question related to environments with examples of successful learners of English, like questions 1, 2 and 12. A significant number of our 33 teachers (19) think a few students have English speaking parents or relatives, which isn't as good as we'd expected in a state like Tlaxcala, with a lot of emigration to the USA and re-immigration, but better than almost none or none.

14 In your estimation, what percentage of students leave your school after 3 years at A2+ level in English (ready to pass the Cambridge A2 Key Test)?

0-*1%* **x8** *2-10%* **x15** *11-20%* **x7** *21-30%* **x2** *31-50%* **x1** *51+%* **x0**

Comments: This level was set by the Secretaría de Educación Pública as the goal for secondary school leavers: "…it is expected that by the end of basic education students should reach, as a minimum, a level equivalent to A2, Waystage" (SEP 2005). Having clearly failed to achieve that, the SEP is now aiming at B1+ in its latest plans, with ELT in public primary schools aiming at A2+. 23 of our 33 teachers consider that only between 0 and 10% of their students achieve A2+. They may consist at least partly of students who came to secondary school with some English from primary school (see Question 1), or from residence in the USA (see Question 2), or who have studied English outside school in a language centre.

General conclusions and reflections

The following conclusions apply directly to the 33 State of Tlaxcala teachers and schools in our survey, and by extension probably to most other public secondary schools in that small central Mexican state. While they may also apply to some, or even a large, extent to most schools in the rest of Mexico, there are almost certainly some very marked differences. Mexico stretches from the US to the Guatemalan border, from the Pacific to the Gulf coast, from wealthier states to much poorer ones, and from large cities to small towns and countryside, and many more surveys of this kind, and surveys going beyond this one, in different parts of Mexico are needed to discover the similarities and differences in ELT conditions and ELT results.

Our first general conclusion is that students entering secondary school with some English from public primary school (Question 1) and students with English from living in the USA (Question 2), even in a state like Tlaxcala with a lot of emigration/re-immigration

across the US border, appear to be contributing little or nothing to the improvement of ELT results in secondary schools. There are very few of the latter (fewer than we anticipated), and very few schools have more than 20% of their new students entering with some English from primary school, either because they didn't have English classes there, or the classes were ineffective.

The expectation of students entering secondary that they'll actually learn English at school (Question 4) is medium to very low, with the largest number ranked as low. This almost endemic expectation of NOT being likely to learn English at school is probably linked to what they see around them: usually few or no members of staff, apart from English teachers, who speak English (Question 12), few relatives, etc., who speak English (Question 13), perhaps including older siblings, ahead of them at school. This negative expectation must impact on motivation, but the motivation of 3rd year students, as perceived by teachers, is not as bad as we'd anticipated (Question 3) and participation of students in general is quite good (Question 5). That may be credited to the teachers and the resilience and/or conformity of the students. However, the results are still poor, and we consider that a vicious circle
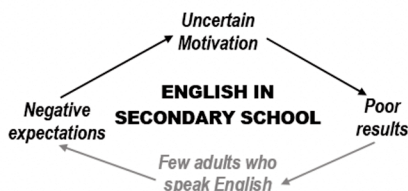
(in the diagram) needs to be attacked, e.g. by requiring all secondary school staff, or at least all new staff, to have, B1+ English (see the comment on Question 12 above). More effective ways to achieve better results also need to be explored, perhaps experimenting in some schools. As popular wisdom has it, "Nothing succeeds like success" and "Lead by example, not by force".

Teaching-learning conditions in the secondary schools in the survey are not as bad as we've experienced personally and have observed in

the past. Most teachers reported 90 to over 120 hours of effective class time (Question 6), which is at or above the SEP norm, and groups of under 40 students (Question 7), which is well below the 50 students Paul once taught for two years and the 60+ he observed on several occasions many years ago. Support for ELT, that is, basic technology and aids like CD players and a computer projector (Question 11), varies enormously, with 18 schools indicating some, and 6 a lot, but 9 none at all. Overall, the conditions are not always very good (groups of under 30 and basic modern technology would be nice in all schools), but usually not very bad either.

In terms of methodology and materials used by all the teachers in a school, the general picture isn't very bright. All but 1 of the 33 teachers work with other teachers, some with more than 3 others (Question 8), but in 5 schools there's virtually no coordination of ELT, so different teachers may be doing very different things, in another 10 schools there's little coordination, and there's a lot of coordination in only 4 schools. Coordination of teaching in a school is very important because otherwise students may be confused and disconcerted by very different approaches in their 3 years of secondary school. On top of that, 14 of the 33 teachers consider the syllabuses and textbooks not at all appropriate and another 9 consider them not very appropriate, while only 2 teachers consider them perfectly appropriate. A big question here is: What syllabuses and materials *would* be largely appropriate for teenagers in public secondary schools in small cities, towns and the countryside of central Mexico, 1,000 kilometres from the nearest US border, and very unlikely ever to travel or stay outside Mexico except to join a largely Spanish-speaking family and community in the USA? Note (as 23 of our 33 teachers may have) that Tlaxcala is very different from a large, industrial, financial and business centre like Monterrey, or a large international vacation and convention centre like Cancún.

What matters most in ELT, of course, is results, and 23 of our 33 teachers estimate that under 10% of students leave their school with A2+ English, the SEP target until recently, but now actually being put higher (Question 14). Another 7 teachers estimate between 11

and 21%, and, surprisingly, 2 estimate between 21 and 30%, and 1 between 31 and 50%. These are estimations, of course, and the students would have to be reliably tested for us to be sure, but the difference between 8 schools estimated at under 1% and 1 school at over 31% is striking and possibly extremely significant.

Specific cases

Each of the 33 teachers who answered the questionnaire describes a specific situation and tells a specific story, but, as was to be expected, most situations and stories are very similar, hence the general conclusions above. However, some situations and stories are notably different. Here's data for three of them, with strikingly different levels of English for students leaving the school (remember, these are the teachers' estimates and they might not correspond to results in the Cambridge A2 Key Test).

	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C
Students leaving school with A2+ English	*0-1%*	*11-20%*	*31-50%*
Students entering school with English from primary	70%	0%	40%
Students with English from residence in USA	Never	Never	Very occasionally
Expectations of learning English of 1st year students	Low	Very low	Medium
Motivation for learning English of 3rd year students	Medium	Medium	Medium
Participation in classes of students in general	Good	Good	Good
Effective hours of English class	Over 120	111-120	91-100
Number of students in groups	31-40	31-40	41-50
Support with basic technology and aids	Some	Some	None
Amount of ELT coordination and collaboration	Some	Some	A lot
Appropriateness of syllabuses and textbooks	Fairly	Not at all	Fairly
Members of school staff with B1+ English	3-5	None	Over 10
Students with English speaking parents or relatives	A few	A few	Almost none

We'll leave you to examine that data and form your own ideas, but we note that the best results here (as estimated by the teacher) go together with over 10 members of school staff with B1+ English and a lot of ELT coordination and collaboration in the school, as well as groups of over 41 students and no support with technology

and aids (teachers presumably take in their own CD players, etc.). We're left with many questions, which may lead to more research. What about you?

Reference

Secretaría de Educación Pública (México) (2005). *Educación Secundaria. Inglés. Programas de Estudio*. SEP.

CHAPTER 7

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ELT IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE STATE OF GUANAJUATO

MARTHA LENGELING & AMANDA WILSON

English is recognized as the modern-day *lingua franca*, and like many other countries, Mexico has adopted policies to increase the teaching of English in its public schools to enhance its ability to compete on the world stage, launching its National English Program, progressively introducing English into Mexican public primary schools, in 2009 (Sayer 2015). Mexican students are studying English at record rates with the prospect of enjoying increased and better job opportunities in the global economy, in private and public sectors. However, there are many questions about the ELT in public schools within this context. The study presented in this article is a continuation of research begun at the Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala, Mexico (Davies & Domínguez 2019). By adding the voices of English language teachers in public secondary schools in the State of Guanajuato to those of teachers in Tlaxcala, we hope to encourage more research in this area and begin a national conversation to help answer many important questions.

Methodology

Davies and Domínguez developed a questionnaire about public secondary school English language teaching in the State of Tlaxcala

and gave it to English language teachers working in those schools who had graduated from the Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala. For the study presented here, 66 English language teachers working in public secondary schools in the State of Guanajuato were invited to answer the same questionnaire and just 9 of them agreed to participate. These teachers come from various public secondary schools throughout the State of Guanajuato, such as the capital of Guanajuato, Leon, San Miguel de Allende, and rural communities. Their participation was solicited through the assistance of current students of our BA in ELT at the Universidad de Guanajuato. While the teachers in the Tlaxcala study were all graduates of one university, the nine participants of this study came from different educational backgrounds. Therefore, an additional question about their education and ELT backgrounds was added to the questionnaire, which revealed that seven have BAs in education, ELT, or applied linguistics and one has a BA in tourism, from a variety of a universities, private and public, and one is currently studying a MA in Applied Linguistics in English Language Teaching at the Universidad de Guanajuato.

As with the Davies and Domínguez study, an effort was made to ensure the validity of responses to the questionnaire. Participants were ensured that their responses were to be treated anonymously. They were further advised, "The questions refer to 'your perception' of factors related to ELT in your school, but we need your answers to be as objective and true as possible, so please think carefully about each one." The responses were tallied and reported as the number of respondents selecting each option, as in the Davies and Domínguez study, and, in the report and discussion of the results below, there is some analysis comparing the Guanajuato results with the Tlaxcala results.

Results and analysis

Below, each question in the questionnaire is given, followed by the answers selected in terms of the number of participants selecting an option, and then there is some discussion of these results and comparison with the results in the Tlaxcala study.

1 *Approximately what percentage of students* **enter** *your school with some English (from primary school, etc.)?*

0% **x2**   *10%* **x3**   *20%* **x1**   *30%* **x2**   *40%* **x0** *50%* **x0** *60%* **x0**
70% **x0** *80%* **x0** *90%* **x1** *100%* **x0**

The responses indicate that by far most students enter public secondary schools in the State of Guanajuato with little or no English, with 5 of the 9 participants (56%) indicating that 0-10% of students have some English when they enter secondary school, another 3 participants (33%) indicating 20-30%, and only one participant indicating that most students (90%) have some English. This result closely matches the responses in the study done in the State of Tlaxcala, where 20 of 33 participants (61%) indicated 0-10% of students with some English, another 6 (18%) indicated 20-30% of students, and only 4 indicated more than 50%, the highest being 70% of students. From a broader perspective, 89% of the teachers in Guanajuato indicated that fewer than 40% of their students enter secondary school with some English and 88% of the teachers in Tlaxcala, almost exact agreement in perception.

2 *Do you have students in your classes who speak English quite well because they have lived in the USA or Canada?*

Always **x0**   *Often* **x0**   *Sometimes* **x1**   *Very occasionally* **x6**   *Never* **x2**

Again, results in Guanajuato are similar to those in Tlaxcala. In Guanajuato, 67% of participants indicated that their students' English-speaking ability is only very occasionally the result of having lived in the USA or Canada, and an additional 22% indicated that was never the case. In Tlaxcala, the results are perhaps even stronger indicators that this is not a significant contributing factor, with 45% for 'very occasionally' and 48% for 'never'. For 'very occasionally' and 'never' combined, there is again strong agreement in perception, with 89% for Guanajuato and 93% for Tlaxcala.

3 *How would you characterize the motivation for learning English of most* **3rd year** *students in your school?*

*Very high **x0** High **x0**   Medium **x7**   Low **x1**   Very low **x1***

Most participants in Guanajuato, 78%, describe their 3rd, or final, year students as having a medium level of motivation for learning English. That compares with 48% in Tlaxcala. In Guanajuato, the remaining two indicate 'low' (1) and 'very low' (1), whereas in Tlaxcala 15% of participants indicated 'high' or 'very high' and 36% 'low' or 'very low'. So, while 'medium' dominated in both states, as it very likely would for math and most school subjects, perceptions were rather different overall.

4 *What expectations of leaving school speaking English fairly well do you think most **1st year** students have?*

*Very low **x3** Low **x1** Medium **x3** High **x2**   Very high **x0***

44% of the Guanajuato participants perceive 'very low' or 'low' expectations in their 1st year students and another 33% 'medium' expectations. That is not quite as negative as in Tlaxcala, where the answers were 58% for 'very low' or 'low' and 33% for 'medium', but in both cases the teachers feel there are few 1st year students with high expectations.

5 *What is student participation in your classes like in general?*

*Very good **x1**   Good **x6** So-so **x2**   Poor **x0**   Very poor **x0***

Despite the somewhat negative responses to the previous questions about motivation at the end of secondary school and expectations at the beginning, both the Guanajuato and the Tlaxcala participants report a generally good level of participation by students in their English classes, with Guanajuato (78% 'very good' or 'good') better than Tlaxcala (55%, with another 36% for 'so-so').

6 *Approximately how many **effective** hours of English class do students receive per year?*

*Under 80 **x1** 81-90 **x1** 91-100 **x2** 101-110 **x3** 111-120 **x1** Over 120 **x1***

The number of hours of English classes per year were scattered across the spectrum, from under 80 to over 120 hours, in the Guanajuato teachers' responses, as was the case in Tlaxcala. However, in both Guanajuato and Tlaxcala, just over half of the teachers estimated between 91 and 110 hours, 56% of teachers in Guanajuato and 58% in Tlaxcala. As noted by Davies and Domínguez, the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) has set the standard as 90 to 100 hours of classroom study for each year (SEP, 2005).

7 *How many students are there in your English classes?*

Under 25 **x0** *25-30* **x2** *31-40* **x5** *41-50* **x2** *Over 50* **x0**

Class size is another area in which the teachers in Guanajuato and Tlaxcala largely concur, with 64% of Tlaxcala teachers reporting 31-40 students, very similar to the 56% of Guanajuato participants, and no reports of classes of over 50 in either state.

8 *How many English teachers are there in your English school?*

Only you **x1** *2-3* **x5** *4-6* **x3** *Over 6* **x0**

Numbers of English teachers in school is again an area where the results are much the same in the two states, with most schools having 2-3 English teachers, followed by 4-6, and with just one school in each state with only 1. In both states, then, the number of English teachers in a school can vary greatly, from only 1 to 6.

9 *If there are 2+ English teachers, how much coordination or collaboration is there among them?*

A lot **x1** *Some* **x0** *A little* **x4** *Virtually none* **x4**

For those participants with two or more English teachers in their school, the Tlaxcala participants appear to enjoy much more coordination or collaboration than teachers in Guanajuato. While 55% of Tlaxcala teachers indicate they have a lot or some, only 11% of Guanajuato teachers do, and while only 15% of Tlaxcala teachers indicate they have virtually none, 44% of Guanajuato teachers do.

10 *In your opinion, how appropriate for the students in your school are the English syllabuses and textbooks?*

Not at all appropriate **x3** *Not very appropriate* **x5** *Fairly appropriate* **x1** *Perfectly appropriate* **x0**

The appropriateness of the English syllabuses and textbooks is another area of considerable coincidence between the Guanajuato and the Tlaxcala participants. Of the Guanajuato teachers, 33% find the syllabuses and textbooks to be not at all appropriate and another 56% not very appropriate, with only 11% finding them fairly appropriate and 0% perfectly appropriate. That compares with 43%, 27%, 24% and 6% in Tlaxcala. In both states, a great majority of the teachers – 89% in Guanajuato and 70% in Tlaxcala – consider their syllabuses and textbooks inappropriate or not very appropriate for their students.

11 *How well supported is your ELT, e.g. school CD player, computer projector, etc.?*

Not at all **x4** *So-so* **x4** *A lot* **x1**

Other types of support in schools, such as the provision of CD players, computers and projectors, show that teachers in both Guanajuato and Tlaxcala would like to have better access to resources. Although 27% of teachers in Tlaxcala indicate they are well supported, this is not the case for Guanajuato. In Tlaxcala, 54% of the teachers indicate that their level of such support is so-so, while in Guanajuato, 44% also find such support to be so-so. Another 27% of Tlaxcala teachers claim to have no support at all, while in Guanajuato, 44% find such support non-existent.

12 *To your knowledge, apart from English teachers, how many members of school staff have B1+ level English?*

Over 10 **x0** *6-10* **x0** *3-5* **x2** *1-2* **x1** *None* **x6**

The number of non-ELT staff with fairly proficient English appears to be low in both Guanajuato and Tlaxcala. The level of English in Guanajuato public secondary schools, apart from English teachers,

appears to be slightly higher in Tlaxcala than in Guanajuato. In Guanajuato 78% of the participants believe there are no more than two with B1+ English, while in Tlaxcala 84% of the participants believe that is the case, and 67% and 42% respectively believe there are no non-ELT members of staff with B1+ level English in their school.

13 *To your knowledge, how many students in your school have English-speaking parents or relatives?*

Many **x0** *Some* **x1** *A few* **x4** *Almost none* **x2** *None* **x2**

Students with English-speaking family members is another area that appears to be very similar in Guanajuato and Tlaxcala. 56% of the Guanajuato teachers believe some or a few students in their school have English-speaking family members and 44% believe almost none or none do, while the corresponding percentages for the Tlaxcala teachers are 67% and 34%.

14 *In your estimation, what percentage of students leave your school after 3 years at A2+ level in English (ready to pass the Cambridge A2 Key Test)?*

0-1% **x2** *2-10%* **x5** *11-20%* **x1** *21-30%* **x1** *31-50%* **x0** *51+%* **x0**

As noted by Davies and Domínguez (2019), the SEP has set a goal of A2 in public *primary* schools and B1 for students at the end of *secondary* school (or lower secondary school), the subject of this study (SEP, 2017). The public secondary school teachers in this and the Tlaxcala study, however, report that only a very small percentage of their students attain that level of English by the time they leave their schools, with 45% of Tlaxcala teachers and 51% of Guanajuato teachers indicating that only 2-10% of their students have reached that level by the time they finish their secondary school education.

Summary and discussion of the data

Adding the nine teachers from Guanajuato in this study to the 33 teachers from Tlaxcala in the Davies and Domínguez study – that is, 42 teachers from 42 different schools in two different states – an

increasingly reliable general picture of ELT in Mexican public secondary schools begins to emerge. The data presented and analyzed above suggests several things. According to the teachers in this study, Mexican students appear to want to learn English as participation and motivation are reportedly good. Responses to other questions, however, seem to indicate that support from the government in Mexican public schools could be stronger. Although the Mexican government has a stated policy of encouraging English-language development in its citizens as part of the goal of participating in a globalized economy, learning a language is difficult and requires a commitment of both time and resources.

Mexican students enter school with little exposure to English within their family environments, nor have they been exposed to English by living in the USA or Canada. The percentage of students entering public secondary school with at least some level of English, whether from primary school or opportunities within the family or from living abroad, is reportedly quite low. It has long been recognized that learning a second language requires a significant amount of input in that language. With limited exposure to English outside the classroom, Mexican public secondary students must rely on their schools to provide the amount of comprehensible input necessary if they are to achieve the English level goal set by the SEP. Although Mexican students seem willing to learn English, the resources required for them to achieve that goal must come from their classrooms. This means that the Mexican government must make a commitment to support the students, the teachers and the schools if Mexican students are to achieve a useful level of English.

The first issue is time. How much classroom time needs to be committed to the study of English? The current goal set by the SEP is 90 to 100 hours, and in both the Guanajuato and Tlaxcala students, about one-third of the participants responded that their schools meet this goal. This translates to three weekly sessions of between 45-50 minutes over the course of a 40-week semester, or 2.25 to 2.5 hours of English study per week. The first question raised by these two independent studies, then, is whether the goal of

90 to 100 hours per semester provides sufficient exposure to English to achieve the SEP goal of B1+ level of English at the end of the public secondary education.

In addition to the time spent in the classroom, of course, is the quality of the educational experience. Another factor that affects a student's ability to learn a second language is class size as the more opportunity a student has to use the language, the better the chance that the student will learn the language. In both Guanajuato and Tlaxcala, most teachers report that class sizes are between 31 and 40 students, which is rather large for language learning. Class size is related to the number of teachers available to teach, and here again, most of the participants in both Guanajuato and Tlaxcala report that there are 1 to 2 English teachers in their schools. Again, for purposes of comparison, English-language class size at the Universidad de Guanajuato is capped at 28 students, approximately one-third less than the size of public secondary school English classes in the States of Guanajuato and Tlaxcala. Smaller class sizes provide English-language students both with more access to their teacher as well as more time using the language in the classroom. Both factors are proven to be important in learning a second language.

Another important factor when considering the quality of the education experience is the syllabus and textbook used in the program. Here, the majority in both Guanajuato and Tlaxcala found their syllabus and textbook are not very or at all appropriate for their students. Other resources, such as CD players, computers, or projectors, are also key components in learning a second language. Here again, many teachers reported their level of support to be so-so or non-existent.

With large classes, few teachers, limited classroom hours for English study, and limited class resources, it would appear to be important to have a good level of coordination and collaboration among the English teachers so that teachers could help each other by sharing teaching ideas, resources and materials, and providing support for each other as they tackle the difficult task of teaching a second language in their environments. This would help them to achieve

optimal results for their students under difficult circumstances. That, however, does not appear to be the case as most teachers in both Guanajuato and Tlaxcala report there is little to no coordination or collaboration with their English-teaching colleagues.

Teachers also report low expectations by their students that they will be able to speak English "fairly well" by the time they finish their secondary education. As we noted at the beginning of this discussion, Mexican students appear to have an interest in learning English, as demonstrated by their level of participation and motivation in the classroom. Perhaps the reality of both their school environment and the proven difficulty of learning a second language then is the cause for their apparent lack of confidence in achieving even the modest goal of being able to speak "fairly well" at the end of their public secondary education. This result is borne out by both the Guanajuato and Tlaxcala participants' reports that most of their students are not leaving their secondary schools with the B1 level of English set by the SEP as its goal.

It would appear from this data that the supposition that Mexican students are motivated to learn English is supported by the finding that student participation in English classes in both Guanajuato and Tlaxcala is relatively good. Perhaps student motivation is being affected by an apparent mixed message in their schools, because while it may be true that the Mexican government has adopted policies to promote English-language learning in public schools, a clear commitment to those policies appears to be lacking. This is an area which should be looked at more in depth. With a genuine commitment to supporting English teachers with resources, such as CD players, computers, or projectors, more appropriate texts and syllabuses, as well as supporting English learners with more trained teachers and smaller class sizes that would provide a better environment for learning a language, Mexican students might more readily achieve the English language goals set by the government.

While this small-scale study examines the teachers' perceptions at the secondary level, it would be helpful to examine teachers´ perspectives at the beginning levels of PRONI. Regarding students

and their English learning, the students arrive at secondary school with limited English from primary school. This is an area where the reasons why the English level is low could be explored, shedding light on what happens before secondary school and providing a better understanding of why secondary students do not reach the expected level of English. In conclusion, what we have presented is only a piece of the puzzle: the perspectives of public secondary school teachers and perhaps future research in public primary schools could help complete the complex picture.

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CHAPTER 8

TEACHING ENGLISH IN MEXICAN INDIGENOUS, MULTICULTURAL AND MULTILINGUAL CONTEXTS

REBECA TAPIA

ELT in Latin America is characterized by a rich cultural heritage that includes a variety of contexts where indigenous languages are spoken. This article explores and builds on two teachers' beliefs about ELT in a Mexican primary school in an indigenous community. Both are experienced primary school teachers, one a heritage speaker of Nahuatl as well as Spanish and the other a native speaker of Spanish only. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Findings reveal that the teachers believe that English lessons should be an integral part of the curriculum of bilingual indigenous schools and should be taught along with the heritage language and Spanish.

Background

Mexico is a country whose national language is Spanish but where more than 60 indigenous languages are spoken. In Mexico, bilingual education refers to indigenous education as well as to the teaching and learning of a foreign language, usually English (Ramírez & Vargas, 2019). Many schools in small towns in Mexico are either bilingual or are located in places where indigenous languages are

spoken as heritage languages. This article reports on and explores the beliefs of teachers working in a bilingual school in an indigenous community.

In 2011, the coordinator of indigenous education in the zone of the school, came to the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP), a public university that has a BA and an MA in ELT, looking for a BA student who could do teaching practice in a bilingual indigenous primary school. She wanted to get a single teacher to teach English to migrant students at the school who had returned to Mexico from the USA, with the purpose of helping them to maintain and develop what was actually their first language, English. We gladly agreed and decided to create a Service Learning program that provided pre-service teachers the opportunity to teach English in that primary school for seven years. The program covered nine pre-service teachers who would teach English to all the students of the school.

My participation as a teacher educator was to guide and supervise these undergraduate trainee teachers. I created a program that could be applied to the six years of primary school. The school had nine groups of about 30 students each. The first year of the ELT project turned out to be the best one because we had a visiting scholar from the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) who collaborated in the supervision and development of the project. His participation motivated the pre-service teachers and helped them to conclude their teaching practice successfully. The pre-service teachers who did their teaching practice that year and this visiting scholar still have good and positive memories of that experience of teaching English and supervising the teaching in a bilingual indigenous school.

The context

The school is in small town near the volcanoes Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl in central Mexico. It is about a two-hour drive from the

city of Puebla, which is the fourth most important city of Mexico. This town has a medium level of migration to (and from) the USA. Many families in this community have relatives living and working in the United States. This is true for many small towns in the state of Puebla, and in other parts of Mexico. This creates an intercultural environment where three languages are in contact – Spanish, Nahuatl and English. This town has a heritage derived from its local culture as a Nahuatl speaking community in which this language was the mother tongue and main language of almost everyone not long ago. However, educational practices in previous purely Spanish monolingual schools caused language loss and many native speakers of Nahuatl decided not to continue transmitting this language to their children.

The school

The school is a bilingual indigenous primary school, where both Spanish and Nahuatl are taught. Most subjects are taught in Spanish and students have a Nahuatl language lesson once a week. The school has a library with books in three languages – Spanish, Nahuatl and English – as a result of donations from schools and organizations.

Most of the students of this bilingual indigenous primary school were born in Mexico, but there are usually one or more migrant students in each group, some born in the USA. Some of them are returnees from the USA who do not plan to go back there, but others come to Mexico for a period of time and then go back to the United States. Some of the migrant children maintain their proficiency in English, especially if they lived in the USA for several years, and even more if they attended an American elementary school for some years. But those who came (or came back) to Mexico at an early age usually lose their English.

Nahuatl is currently spoken mainly by grandparents of the children at the school. Some of the parents understand it but do not speak it much. Therefore, the school is facing various linguistic challenges in

its multicultural setting, and it is trying to revitalize the use of Nahuatl, as noted by Tapia, Mejía & Iglesias (2017).

The school's teachers

Three of the nine regular teachers of the school and the school Principal are heritage speakers of Nahuatl. The other seven teachers are native speakers of Spanish only. Most of them are experienced teachers, but about half of them change every year for personal reasons, so the school needs to integrate the new staff and develop collaborative teaching strategies every school year. Most of them are trained primary school teachers, except one of the senior teachers who was trained as a middle and high school teacher. None of them speak English fluently.

The participants' beliefs about language teaching at school

Both of the two the teachers that were interviewed for the project were women.

First teacher

This teacher was born in the town where the school is located, and she is a heritage speaker of Nahuatl. She trained as a primary school teacher, and she also took some BA in ELT courses but did not finish the BA. She lived for a year in the Southwest of the USA, taking a diploma for indigenous teachers at a State University located in that area. Three years later she decided to study an MA in indigenous education in South America. Her husband lived in the USA for some years, but is now back to Mexico.

Her beliefs:

She believes that the use of Nahuatl needs to be revitalized, with the language used more in the school. She teaches Nahuatl and her town's traditions. She believes that language and culture should be taught together, agreeing with a teacher in another study conducted by Tapia et al (2014). She has invited her students' grandparents to her classroom to describe, in Nahuatl and in detail, their traditions. Her diploma course at an American university helped her to develop the project called 'cultural baskets', where traditional Mexican baskets

are brought to the classroom with cultural artifacts (realia) to talk about tradi-tions. This is the procedure she used with her students' grandparents. After her stay in the Southwest of the USA, and recognizing the migration to the USA from her town, she realized how important it is for her students to learn English. She now collaborates in the organization of an annual cultural visit of Latino students from the USA to her hometown to motivate them to learn Spanish and youngsters in her the town to learn English. She believes that English should be taught at her school, linking it to the linguistic and cultural heritage of the town.

Second teacher

The second teacher is a native speaker of Spanish only. She trained as a middle and school teacher, and she has taken some English courses, but her level of English is only around A2. She has a sister who lives in the USA, and she takes care of her nephew, who is a returnee from the USA. She was born in the city of Puebla and she still lives there.

Her beliefs:

She also believes the use of Nahuatl needs to be revitalized, with the language used more in the school. She teaches Nahuatl, but she does not speak it fluently. She has just learned some texts and words in Nahuatl that she teaches to her students. She usually encourages her students to learn both Nahuatl and English. She likes to carry out bilingual activities where children can use both Nahuatl and Spanish. For example, she taught one of her groups a popular Christmas carol both in Spanish and Nahuatl, and the children enjoyed it very much. She thinks that English should be taught as an academic subject, similarly to Nahu-atl, incorporating some bilingual activities.

That last point implies that the second teacher believes that English should be taught just as a school subject, while the first teacher believes it should be taught incorporating cultural and real-life elements, considering the local context of students returning from the USA, some going (or going back) there, and Latino students from the USA visiting the students' school and town. Both of them are fully aware that they are teaching in an indigenous school and they believe it is important to teach Nahuatl in order to revitalize its use.

Discussion and conclusions

These teachers' beliefs seem to present two rather different views of how English can, and should, be taught in indigenous, and migrant, contexts:

1. **ELT with strong local cultural and real-life elements**. English should be taught using the experiences and knowledge of returnees from the USA, Latino students invited to visit from the USA, people (students and parents) planning to migrate to the USA, and so on. This implies the application of community-based pedagogies and the development of special materials to teach the language. In addition, an intercultural trilingual curriculum could help learners develop multilingual proficiency and intercultural awareness.

2. **ELT as a school subject, taking the local indigenous context into account**. The focus should be on language proficiency, much as in any school, with English as a curricular subject following a syllabus, using standard ELT materials. In addition, the knowledge and use of three languages in the community, should be emphasized and exploited.

The first view, or its intercultural trilingual aspect, is the one behind the curriculum that I developed for the Service Learning program at this school. However, the full and effective development of the ELT component of this type of intercultural multilingual curriculum requires enormous effort and work. The content and materials need to be tailor-made and this is not an easy task. Besides, adopting a community-based ELT pedagogy would need the involvement of different actors such as returnees from the USA (students and relatives of students), teachers, materials writers, and the authorities. It would be a very interesting but extremely challenging process.

Why should we go for an intercultural multilingual curriculum?

To exploit the presence of three languages in the community. **Spanish** as the national and main community language, although it is worth mentioning that they speak a variety of Spanish influenced by Nahuatl. **Nahuatl** as the heritage language of some younger members of the community and the mother tongue of older ones linked to a set of traditions that are partially observed by most members of the community. And **English** as the third language for most students, the first language of migrant students born in the USA or taken there as very young children, and because of the importance of English as a lingua franca in today's world.

This type of curriculum could enhance trilingual literacy. It could help students to maintain and increase the use of Nahuatl as the heritage language of the community and repository of their ancestors' culture. It could help returnees to maintain their English and other students to learn it in order to prepare for possible migration, visits to migrant relatives or interaction with friends or relatives living in the USA who speak little or no Spanish. And, as in all schools, it could help some students as skilled workers or professionals in the future.

How can this curriculum be created and implemented?

By exploiting the potential motivation for language learning generated by the presence of and the interaction among three languages and cultures in the community. One example of how this has actually been done was the organization of cross-cultural activities in Christmas festivals that contained different cultural shows performed by the children of the school. These Christmas festivals were organized by the School Principal, the regular primary teachers of the groups (teaching in Spanish and Nahuatl) and the Service Learning program English teachers. Parents also participated, preparing food from each culture – Mexican *ponche*, indigenous tamales and American hot dogs. They were cultural festivals with memorable – and delicious – activities for the children, parents

and grandparents, teachers and visitors. Different members of the community were an integral part of these activities sharing their language proficiency and culture.

Through regular Ministry of Education (SEP) school Spanish programs and materials, but supplemented by special activities related to the community and to other indigenous communities that share the same cultural heritage. Through Nahuatl materials available on the web and as publications by the SEP and other organizations. Through adapting available primary school English materials and activities, paying special attention to the needs of returnees and other members of the community, linking these materials and activities to their context and living culture.

This school is facing linguistic challenges, reflected in the two teachers' beliefs described in this article. These challenges are present in many small, and some quite large, towns in Mexico, and other Latin American countries. We live in a globalized world, with international migration, but local contexts are still of great importance for language teaching. The teaching of English in indigenous contexts, like the one in this article, call out for ELT practitioners to explore the possibility of developing trilingual intercultural community-based curriculums, which could integrate the three languages present in the community through their cultures and the real-life experiences and needs of the people.

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ELT IN A MEXICAN UNIVERSITY'S LANGUAGE CENTRES

CELSO PÉREZ

(interviewed by Paul Davies)

Paul: Thank you very much for fitting this interview into your agenda, Celso. I really appreciate it.

Celso: My pleasure, Paul.

Paul: I believe the BUAP has compulsory English courses for undergraduates and also English courses in several language centres.

Celso: That's right. There are English courses up to A2 level in each BUAP faculty or school, which undergraduates have to take if they don't have A2+ English on entry. Most, in fact, go into beginner's courses at first. Then there are courses that BUAP students and staff can take voluntarily in the Centro de Lenguas Extranjeras (CELE), and also courses for the general public in Cursos de Extensón Universitaria (CEU).

Paul: The low level of English of students entering the university no doubt reflects the generally poor results in schools. That makes English in higher education and in language centres very important. I imagine that some of the students in the CELE courses also have compulsory English classes in their faculty.

Celso: Yes, I'm afraid most of the university's faculty English courses have poor conditions, often over 50 students in a group, for example. In contrast, the groups in the language centres have a maximum of 25 students, and sometimes under 10. As they're optional, the atmosphere in language centre courses also tends to be more positive. So students in faculties who seriously want to learn English often enrol in CELE courses.

Paul: Right. How many language centres does the BUAP have?

Celso: Well, between CELE and CEU, in Puebla City we have three sites with language courses, not just English, but other languages too, but naturally most students are in English courses. They are here in the Facultad de Lenguas, in Ciudad Universitaria, the main campus, and in the Complejo Cultural Universitario. We also offer CEU language courses in three other cities in Puebla State.

Paul: That must mean a lot of students of English.

Celso: Well, in CELE courses, for BUAP students and staff, we have about 4,000 students, and about 4,500 in CEU courses in Puebla City, with another 500 or so in the other three cities. Overall, about 80% of the students are in English courses, followed a long way behind by German.

Paul: Some 9,000 language students, then, most of them in English courses. That's a lot of people. From my experience with language centres of all kinds, I imagine that most of the students are in beginner and elementary courses. Is that the case in the BUAP language centres – a sort of flat pyramid with a very wide base of beginner and low elementary courses and just a few advanced courses at the top?

Celso: Yes, it is. Most students start at beginner or low elementary level. And then many drop out after a few courses, up to half of them before completing the basic courses. Only about a quarter of our students are in intermediate and advanced courses. I think the difficulty of learning English to a high level, the lack of time and the cost are among the main reasons for that, but we must obviously

keep on working at getting more students to continue to higher levels. Students in the CELE courses for BUAP students and staff tend to stay through more courses than students in the CEU courses for the general public.

Paul: Yes, it's easy to say "Quiero aprender inglés", but it takes more work and persistence than most people expect, and when the courses are optional, not compulsory… well, dropping out is always an option. Has that pattern – the flat pyramid – always been the case, and is it changing now? I mean, is the proportion of people in intermediate and advanced courses increasing in relation to those in beginner and elementary courses?

Celso: No, unfortunately the pattern hasn't changed much. School ELT doesn't seem to be producing significantly better results yet, and, as I said, we need get more students to continue to higher levels in our language centres.

Paul: Yes, that's the endless challenge with optional courses, getting students to continue. Even when they start off motivated, that motivation often runs out. I believe you have courses for teenagers and for adults. What's the approximate proportion of each?

Celso: Well, the students in the CELE courses for BUAP students and staff are adults, of course, but in the CEU courses just over 60% are teenagers and just under 40% are adults.

Paul: That's interesting, a very high proportion of teenagers. It may be another indication that school English often isn't working well.

Celso: Right. Like other students, most teenagers enter at beginner level, and many drop out after a few courses. That may be partly because Course 4 gets them to the end of the secondary school program, A2 level, and many are taking extra English just because their parents want them to improve their school grades!

Paul: Yes, motivation should be generally better in voluntary study in a language centre, but it may not always be so voluntary for teenagers! How do you try to create a favourable environment for English language learning in the BUAP language centres?

Celso: Well, we have self-access centres, conversation clubs, and occasional events in English. And lots of people speak English outside the classroom here in the Faculty, of course, and in the other language centres too, so students hear that around them. The people speaking English outside the class-room include students in higher level courses, and they're positive models and good examples for the lower level students. As I said before, we'd like many more students in higher level courses, but we do have up to 2,000 of them.

Paul: Right, and that distinguishes your language centres from most schools, where often nobody but the English teachers has A2+ English. Apart from teaching English, and other languages, certification through proficiency tests is one of your big activities, right?

Celso: Yes, we give English proficiency tests to a lot of people each year. Last year, it was about 3,700, mostly at A2 and B1 levels, but some at B2, C1 and even C2 levels.

Paul: I noticed on a BUAP website that you offer TOEFL ITP, Trinity and Anglia proficiency tests, but not Cambridge or TOEFL iBT. My guess is that's because of cost – Cambridge tests and TOEFL iBT are quite expensive, especially for public university students. Is that the case?

Celso: Yes, cost is an important consideration for us, and our students. Another is that getting teachers certified as Cambridge examiners and having them do oral testing would complicate life for us.

Paul: Well, thanks for all that information, Celso. The BUAP language centres are clearly doing a lot of important ELT work, serving a lot of people, both university students and staff and the general public. I understand from experience the challenges you and your staff face, especially trying to get people to stick at learning English and not give up too soon. Of course, what finally gets people to learn a language well, in most cases, is the actual need to use the language, immersion in communication in the

language. That's the idea behind The BUAP's House of English, isn't it?

Celso: Exactly. The House of English is for students who really need or want to reach an upper intermediate or advanced level in English, and it has culture courses, conversation courses, business English courses, and others, according to demand, not just regular English courses. The teachers are all native or native-like speakers of English, and we try to maintain an immersion-in-English atmosphere. There are about 700 more students in the Casa Inglesa to add to the numbers I gave before. And we have a Casa Alemana and a Casa Francesa too.

Paul: That makes it about 10,000 students in BUAP language centres, then, most in English courses. That nice, big, round number is a good note to end on. Thank you very much, Celso.

Celso: Thank you, Paul. It's been a pleasure.

CHAPTER 10

RE-ENGINEERING ELT IN A MEXICAN STATE UNIVERSITY

EDWARD AMADOR, VERÓNICA ESPINO,
CLAUDIA HERNÁNDEZ AND LAURA LÓPEZ

Background

The Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo (UAEH), Mexico, is a public institution that considers the learning of English to be a vital part of the integral formation of its students. In 1992, the UAEH decided to include English as a compulsory subject in all its undergraduate degree programs as well as its high schools. That called for the implementation of well-informed strategies and actions to ensure that students were provided with high quality English language teaching, but ELT in the UAEH was more impro-vised than planned in those days, and EFL learning results were generally poor.

In 1999, aware of weaknesses in its ELT and of the vital role of qualified and competent teachers, the UAEH established a Licen-ciatura en Enseñanza de la Lengua Inglesa, which produced its first graduates in 2003. Presumably partly as a result, the EFL learning results in the UAEH high schools and university improved in the following years, but they remained generally far from satisfactory.

In 2012, the Dirección Universitaria de Idiomas (now Centro de Lenguas) of the UAEH began to develop new ELT programs, in-

service EFL teacher development programs, EFL teacher assessment systems, and ELT materials specifically for UAEH students. The idea was to integrate all those elements with the hope of finally achieving the radical improvement in the teaching and learning of English that our University (and many others in Mexico) had long sought and needed.

The project: ELT programs, teacher development, and teacher assessment

In 2013, the UAEH Programa Institucional de Lenguas (PIL) that the Centro de Lenguas had prepared was approved by the Consejo Universitario. PIL, and the new syllabuses for High school and University ELT, while drawing on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, took our UAEH students' characteristics and needs very much into account. We tried to make them as learner-centered as teaching plans and syllabuses can be.

Next, after collecting key data regarding EFL teaching and learning in previous years, the Centro de Lenguas started offering in-service development sessions for UAEH teachers of English (and of French and Italian also), informing them about the new foreign language teaching philosophy and program of the university, and providing them with appropriate FLT strategies and techniques. In 2015, the Centro de Lenguas consolidated those development sessions into a program called (for English teachers) 'Building Effective Teaching' or BET, and it has been delivered (and continuously developed) from then up to the present.

Establishing BET and making it work effectively was not easy. The program was criticized and resisted at first by some 'conservative' teachers, but, slowly, it was accepted more and more until it became firmly established and appreciated. Aside from dealing with its initially mixed reception by teachers, it was necessary, of course, to build a team of trainers who worked well together. They were drawn first from the Centro de Lenguas, and then some highly qualified and experienced UAEH English teachers were brought in. This

'Teaching Development Team' (TDT) has benefited greatly from two very experienced external ELT experts, with Dr Corrine Brue leading the team, and Dr Patricia Grounds providing key input and coaching.

The BET program consists of 2 modules of 25 hours each, which can be taken in the winter (December) or summer (June) recess. Both modules must be taken to complete the program. So far, 96% of all UAEH English teachers have completed it, which means 228 out of 238 teachers. New teachers are employed every semester, so the program will continue for them.

BET begins by presenting and examining the principles underlying the teaching philosophy of the UAEH, which is based on the general consensus among most top applied linguists and ELT methodologists. It then works on strengthening teachers' classroom skills by proposing and demonstrating teaching cycles and techniques, using coursebooks produced specifically for the UAEH (see below). It also aims to develop other teacher skills, including lesson planning and the assessment of students during lessons. And it prepares teachers for an evaluation instrument that checks six key teacher characteristics and competences. This instrument is used to evaluate the attitude, aptitude and teaching ability of UAEH teachers.

In the BET program we try to avoid giving the impression that it aims at straight-jacketing teachers, and actually encourage them to explore different teaching options (important because new ones are coming along all the time). But BET does try to guarantee that all UAEH English teachers follow the same basic principles and approach, offering all UAEH students a degree of standardization in their English courses, avoiding disconcerting contrasts between one teacher/course and another.

After establishing BET, the Centro de Lenguas turned to teacher assessment, with classroom observation based on a model of teaching competences. These were considered in terms of six dimensions, with indicators that show how well a teacher is imple-

menting the general principles and approach of UAEH English language teaching. These class observations have been carried out since 2016, and 64 out of the 228 UAEH English teachers that have completed BET, or 27%, have been observed in this scheme. Teachers have been selected at random, as recommended by the university's Dirección General de Evaluación, in order to obtain representative data.

The Centro de Lenguas has also created a system to help English teachers pursue and record their professional development. It is a platform on which teachers themselves create their profiles, uploading evidence of their professional updating and development, e.g. English language certificates, ELT-related professional studies, ELT seminars and workshops. This system is supported by the UAEH Dirección de Personal Académico and the Dirección de Información y Sistemas.

The Centro de Lenguas believes that all the above actions and systems can contribute substantially to the improvement of English language teaching in the UAEH and, even more important, to the improvement of English language learning. Though no comprehensive post-reengineering evaluation has been carried out yet, there are many indications that English learning results in the UAEH are improving substantially.

Customized EFL coursebooks with online platforms

Textbooks produced specifically for the UAEH were mentioned above as a component of the reengineering project. Work on these started in 2013 with a Centro de Lenguas team led by an external ELT expert and experienced EFL coursebook author, Paul Davies. Apart from the fact that the books were to be specifically for UAEH students (and, therefore, much more learner-centered than EFL books usually can be), another key aspect of the books was that they would closely match the new syllabuses, and vice versa, in content and approach (which, again, is not usual).

The coursebooks for the UAEH High Schools were started first, with the title *Make It Real! Junior*, and the books for university undergraduates, *Make It Real! Professional*, were started after the first two of the six High School books had been published in 2014. All six books of both series have been in use since 2016, with the *Junior* books going up to A2+ level, and the *Professional* books up to B1+ level. In both series, the last books turn towards preparation for international proficiency tests, *Junior* mainly towards Cambridge KET, and *Professional* mainly towards TOEFL ITP. The following extracts (in full colour and page design in the published book, of course) indicate how learner-centered each of the coursebook series is.

From *Make It Real! Junior*, Book A1.1, beginner level for High School students (UAEH, 2016):

Activity B [listening icon]

1. Listen to three people talking in Teotihuacan. In the table below, write their nationalities and their hometowns.

2. Listen again and complete the information they give about their towns.

Name	Nationality	Hometown	Information about their hometowns
Sally	_____	_____	People eat a lot of _____ The port _____
Eric	_____	_____	The region produces _____ The people wear _____ and dance _____
Emma	_____	_____	They make _____ in _____ People _____ a lot of _____

Activity C [speaking icon]

1. In pairs, act the parts of a foreigner and a Mexican from Mérida or Oaxaca or Guadalajara or Monterrey or Veracruz or another city. Look at this example and the box of verbs.

> Foreigner: Where are you from in Mexico?
> Mexican: Pachuca. It's in the center of Mexico, north of Mexico City.

eat	make
drink	produce
have	speak
live	wear

Foreigner: Does Pachuca have typical food?

Mexican: Yes, it does, 'pastes'. They're originally from England.

Foreigner: Really? Do people wear typical clothes?

Mexican: No, they don't.

And…

From *Make It Real! Professional* Book A1.1, false beginner level for university undergraduates (UAEH, 2017):

English for your studies and profession

1. Read and complete this questionnaire.

What do you need English for?

Check (✓) the appropriate boxes. You can check one or various options for each question.

1 In your degree course, what do you need English for?
☐ For oral communication ☐ To read information online ☐ To read books, articles, manuals, etc.
☐ To write assignments ☐ For projects ☐ Other: _____

2 When you graduate, what are the probable uses and advantages of English in your profession?
☐ For regular work ☐ To get a job requiring English ☐ For international congresses, etc.
☐ For post-graduate study ☐ To impress colleagues ☐ Other: _____

3 Which skills in English are particularly useful in your profession?
☐ Listening comprehension (to understand training courses, meetings, congresses, etc.)
☐ Speaking (to give oral presentations, proposals, reports, etc.)
☐ Reading comprehension (to understand reports, manuals, articles and other documents)
☐ Writing (reports, proposals, articles and other documents)
☐ Oral negotiation (strategic listening and speaking)
☐ Correspondence (communicating through reading and writing, by email or ordinary mail)
☐ Other: _____

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2. In groups, compare and explain your answers to the question-naire. Note similarities and differences, and the majority opinion or perception for each question.

Online platforms to accompany the coursebooks were planned from the beginning of the project in 2013, but the work on the course-books was so challenging and time-consuming that the platforms were almost entirely neglected for two years or more. When both series of books were nearing completion, serious attention was given to the platforms (which was to be yet another big challenge) and they came along quite fast. They are currently also nearing comple-tion, with general grammar, vocabulary and reading material for both *Junior* and *Professional*, and ESP material for *Professional* in the fields of Administration & Economics, Agriculture & Environment, Computing Systems & Electronics, Construction & Engineering, Health Sciences, and Humanities & Social Sciences (more learner-centeredness).

The Centro de Lenguas believes that the strongly learner-centered, communicative and inductive nature of the books and platforms is an important contribution to UAEH English language teaching.

Summary and conclusions

Twenty-six years have passed since English became a compulsory subject in UAEH undergraduate degree programs, with generally poor results there and in high school, as in almost all Mexican public (and many private) universities in the past, and in many still. Over those years, actions were taken and systems established in the UAEH (most notably the creation of a Licenciatura en Enseñanza de la Lengua Inglesa) that produced some improvement, but EFL learning results continued to be far from satisfactory. That led to the integrated reengineering of our ELT that began in 2012, with the elements and components described and discussed in this article. It was an enormous enterprise and challenge, but it seems to be producing a significant improvement in the results of our ELT. Our next step should be to measure and evaluate current ELT results throughout the UAEH to see where results are becoming generally satisfactory and where they are not (if that is still the case).

Reference

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CHAPTER 11

INDUCTIVE, DEDUCTIVE… OR SEDUCTIVE?

PAUL SELIGSON

Most of you reading this will, I imagine, be non-native English teachers, working with classes of native speakers of Spanish or Portuguese in Latin America, whose needs, difficulties and many advantages when it comes to learning English are quite specific, and relatively easy to define.

However, most of you will also be using teaching materials and methods devised in Anglophone countries, usually by native speakers of English, who may or may not have experience of teaching in Latin America. Such materials are designed to accommodate both multilingual classes - in order to sell 'at home' in the UK/US, etc., but also 'for different L1 speakers around the world', following the usual, generalised, 'global English approach'. Typically, they are based on 'native speaker frequency', employing some kind of 'communicative/task-based-type' approach. These 'packages' – which is what most course book series now are – have, by definition, to be much less specific to fit a multitude of scenarios, most of which are very different from our day-to-day reality here in Latin America. Despite commercial claims otherwise, they cannot be 'ideal' for our learners, as they aren't designed specifically for them, ignore what they know, often hiding lexis and structures that are easy for them, simply because it's too hard elsewhere. This

results either in teachers having to skip, adapt, supplement and even apologise for not using the prescribed material, or equally often, 'teaching the book' in spite of students' real needs and potential strengths, which cannot provide their most efficient route to learning English quickly.

Obviously, we should be using much more locally tailored materials across the board, but that's a topic for another day. This article will exemplify the problem by focusing on one simple way to modify standard practice, to best advantage our teenage and adult students by better exploiting their existing linguistic knowledge.

Mainstream grammar teaching follows two approaches: **deductive** or **inductive**. The former is essentially rule-driven, top-down, taking a general 'rule', then applying and polishing it through examples. Inductive is more bottom-up, first noticing patterns then, through guided discovery, working out 'the rule'. Both approaches are usually followed by a series of exercises, which are often very similar.

Both approaches have pros and cons, both are reciprocal and iterative. Inductive learning works best when languages have consistent patterns of use and form, e.g. the written form of past tense endings, or comparative/superlative adjectives, but not when things are irregular, complex or subtle, e.g. the **pronunciation** of *-ed* endings, the use of modal verbs, or the use/non-use of articles, where a deductive list of rules, given by the teacher, followed by multiple examples, is more effective. Most teachers, including myself, combine the two approaches, and most contemporary course books include both, often using induction within the lesson itself, and deduction in a separate grammar summary later.

My problem with both methods in our Latin American context is that neither approach is consistently appropriate for Spanish and Portuguese speakers, and so will always be 'clunkier' than need be. Being more learner-centred, inductive teaching/learning is generally deemed superior as it requires active engagement, choice-making and, through deeper-processing, should lead learners to

understand and remember better. When done well, inductive 'discovery learning' can increase confidence and motivation. However, my objective here is to look at the downsides of induction, particularly with classes of students with the same native language, which the teacher knows, then offer an equally effective but far more efficient alternative.

On the face of it, induction appears logical and democratic but, in practice, numerous problems arise. Text-based inductive or 'guided discovery' classes usually follow this sort of route:

1. Some kind of lead-in to a text, maybe pre-teaching a key item or two.
2. Read/listen once for gist.
3. Re-read/listen again for more detailed understanding, often doing further lexical work.
4. Re-re-read/listen again to [part(s) of] the text or extracts to induce, or discover with the help of the teacher, the key features and rules of the target language.

Comments on the above process

In my experience, by the time you reach the third reading of a written text, it can often feel repetitive, dragging learners back through a text, which they may not have found particularly thrilling in the first place, just to service an inductive routine. This is especially unnecessary when the grammar point is exactly the same in their own language!

Obviously, this is the same more generally with the inductive elicitation of features and rules of lexical items too. What's the point of dancing around and through hoops, providing a glossary or even an illustration to elicit or concept-check a word or phrase which is a cognate for our learners? Surely we can find better uses for class time?

Or, equally, with a difficult listening text which they didn't understand much of the first or second time, the third time they listen

won't be significantly different unless they're reading the script as well, which is normally an acceptance of defeat in listening work anyway! Repeated visits to a text, which learners didn't and often wouldn't choose for themselves, can't be the most efficient way to make a point to a disparate class trying to learn English as fast as possible. All classes are mixed ability, learners will not achieve the same levels of comprehension simultaneously, so it's bound to feel either too hard, too easy or repetitive to some, and probably most of them. Here in Latin America, we usually face mixed motivation too, passing the course or getting the certificate and moving on a.s.a.p. being most learners' main priority.

So, motivation to re-re-read/listen comes mainly from the teacher, in the name of a particular tactic, not from the students' real curiosity about text content, much of which they will already either have absorbed, or given up on.

Besides, texts – and increasingly video clips – are often chosen not so much for their relevance to a particular group of learners but because they exemplify certain language points. For example, the most suggested song lyrics to teach the Present Continuous on the Internet are Fools Garden's *Lemon Tree* (1996) and *Tom's Diner* by Suzanne Vega (1984), neither of which are likely to be the musical choices of contemporary learners.

The main issue is the length of time induction can take to make what is often a relatively straightforward point, particularly for Romance language speakers, where English is often very similar to what they already know in their own language. Class time is precious: for many it's still their only, weekly chance to practise expressing themselves face to face with others in English. Could this 'trying to work out what's going on time' not be more profitably used giving everybody additional language development and communicative practice? My reasoning is this:

Class teaching isn't remotely the same as one-to-one teaching. The key thing is to keep all the group busy, simultaneously wherever possible. Some students will always 'get it' faster than others, the

bigger the class the larger the differential usually is. Yes, the quick can try to explain or exemplify to the slower ones, but that can be awkward, fragmentary, even divisive, as well as very time-consuming, and teachers often have to intervene, re-explain, and then end up eliciting or providing a translation or explanation anyway.

And, when do students 'get it' anyway? What is the 'hallelujah moment', when they finally say 'Ahora sí / Agora sim'? Nine times out of ten it comes when the penny drops and they've just worked out the equivalent in their own language! So, why not make that moment happen sooner, for all of them at once? Thornbury (2010) concurs: "Learners will use translation, even if covertly, as a strategy for making sense of L2, so it makes sense to use it as an overt tool, so all the class get the message simultaneously".

Using an induction approach places a significant extra demand on teachers, native and even more non-native English speakers, to elicit, prompt and guide students appropriately and effectively. This is obviously easier for teachers with stronger English, plus training in eliciting, concept-checking and the like, and they are certainly not the majority of teachers in Latin America.

There's always the danger of learners not getting it or coming up with an incomplete or inaccurate rule, which means more (wasted) time and living longer still with uncertainty.

Many learners, particularly those more used to teacher-led deductive spoon-feeding, or simply the weaker ones in any class, find this frustrating.

Global course books cannot take individual L1s into account, so lessons often end up taking a long time to make what is a very simple point, for example, in our case, not only the passive voice or conditionals, but also a lot of lexis. After all, 58% of English derives from Latin, we share thousands of recognisable cognates, and much about English is guessable, even transparent, for our learners.

Many of the exercises created around inductive methods are simply there to induct, when the time and page space could be better used

for earlier and additional practice, e.g. inclusion of more cognates in texts and analysis/glossaries only for the few false cognates.

Over-using the same approach or strategy, whatever it may be, unit after unit, level after level, is, I believe, certainly not the most stimulating nor effective way to teach a class.

The current penchant for 'flipping' (out of class instruction, e.g. a handout or online), which I heartily endorse, suggests it would surely often be wiser to have the induction (or deduction) done **before** class, so teachers can begin by confirming the point immediately, then get on with the really important phases of practice, personalisation and appropriate feedback.

have studied
I ~~study~~ English since last year.
have you lived
How long ~~do you live~~ in Texas?

This is exactly how my suggested alternative would work. Imagine writing on the board one of these items at the start of a class, intended to practice **either** expressing age **or** uses of the present perfect:

I'm
~~I have fourteen years.~~

How would any learner whose L1 is a Romance language understand the error and correct form in these examples? Through mental contrast, thinking between languages, without having to say a word in their own language. This might appear to come directly from a page of the 'Contrastive Analysis Handbook.' However, unlike traditional translation or contrast-based methods, you're not being asked to verbalise anything in any language but English, merely **notice** what goes wrong if you translate literally, **extrapolate** and **begin to say or write it correctly**.

For me, this is the best approach to dealing with almost inevitable errors, and can work particularly well if combined with a pre-class 'flip' too. The huge difference between same L1 and multilingual classes is that you can anticipate obvious L1-transfer errors, so we really should be making that our starting point, both for lesson preparation and input, to exploit that advantage to best effect. The simple message is 'Whatever you do, don't make this transfer mistake!' If we don't do this, we know it will happen, again and again, so why not do it? You don't need to verbalise any L1 to make the point nor understand it. Indeed, you don't even need a teacher! It talks directly to our learners, in their heads.

To reiterate the point, international course books don't do this simply because they can't anticipate mixed nationality/language groups' transfer errors, and don't want to suggest what might be an irrelevant error. Teaching multilingual classes, as in the UK, USA or multilingual countries, and being unable to translate or have much idea what translation might bring, you have to elicit and check thoroughly until you're sure everybody whose language you don't know has 'got it', which is why inductive approaches are so dominant. I'm not saying 'don't induct', not at all, it can be very effective and I use it all the time. I'm merely stating the obvious, that here in Latin America, we don't have to use induction nearly as much as teachers in other contexts, and that we have a more efficient option available whenever we wish, **during**, **before** or **instead of** induction.

To my mind, this effectively combines deductive – students are given 'the rule' almost at once – and inductive – from the examples the students quickly conclude the rule.

Since I work mainly with Latin Americans, most of whom are broad-minded, with a great sense of humour, I'm calling this alternative 'seductive'! What could be more enticing to learners and teachers than 'seductive grammar'?!

This simple technique works across all levels, from Beginner to C1. Here are four more examples, from Seligson et al (2020).

> *many*
> How ~~much~~ people were there?
>   *do*
> How often/you eat pizza?
>   *did   go*
> Where/you ~~went~~?
> *Do you*
> ~~You~~ like pop music?
>   *long have you lived*
> How ~~many years do you live~~
> here?

> Home is the ~~most~~ nice ^*st*
> place ~~of~~ the world.
>   *in*

> *f   W*
> (From) where are you?
> *am*
> I/from Spain.

> *had*
> If I ~~would have~~ paid to
> park my car, I wouldn't ~~get~~
> a parking fine.   *have gotten*

Can you sense a context, or even hear someone saying these sentences? Perhaps yourself correcting a student, or maybe even making the error years ago when you were learning English if it isn't your native language?

My suggestion is that we **consistently model translation L1 interference traps to avoid right at the start of class.** Students look at them, ideally on arrival, think, get the message, and on we go with the lesson – without speaking Spanish or Portuguese at all. As with an initial 'flip', they comprehend the main thrust of the lesson, the sentences you choose provide them with a context, they know what not to do as well as what to do, and are ready to get

on with practising from the off, without having to say a word in their own language.

The multiple advantages are:

We avoid over-using the same approach or strategy, whatever it may be, unit after unit, level after level, which is certainly not the most stimulating nor effective way to teach a class.

Mental contrast, immediately contextualises language for them. You don't need to spend time building a context for the examples.

Accelerated comprehension. No need for lengthy deductive presentation or lengthier inductive session.

You can't stop teens and adults from seeking equivalents and translating, so it embraces the inevitable. Trying to deny L1-English contrast can confuse, frustrate, delay and generally slow down classroom learning.

Efficient, giving much more time for practice. 'Contrast is a time-efficient way to convey meaning, compared to demonstration, explanation, working out meaning from context' (Thornbury 2010).

Truly democratic. Everybody, weak and strong, gets the message faster than piece by piece induction.

Wholly relevant: students recognise the errors as 'their own'.

Anticipating errors accelerates early accuracy, saving both the embarrassment of making obvious errors and the need for so much teacher correction.

Respecting existing linguistic knowledge, builds confidence and autonomy. Learners feel smarter and more able to teach themselves.

Generates more peer correction sooner because students know what is right and wrong and have a model to refer (each other) to from the get go.

Anticipating errors accelerates early fluency and is **memorable** too. Learners produce more, sooner, internalising 'the rule' through repeated use. They should remember at least as well as if they had been through 'induction', as outlined above, as they will have had more time practising and generating examples of their own within the class itself.

Plays to the bilingual teacher's strengths. Knowing the L1 of all your students, being able to put yourself in their linguistic shoes, anticipating and guiding appropriately, is a huge advantage, offering enormous opportunities for empathy, learner-respect for you as a model and your pedagogy. It's tremendously comforting for students to know they're in the hands of an ideal teacher for them.

Highly motivating and wholly appropriate for teenagers and adults in same L1, mixed ability classes.

Best of all, **nobody is asked to verbalise the students' own language at all.** A perfect fit for language schools where its use is considered undesirable, and cross-lingual activities like translation are discouraged. Indeed, it has exactly the opposite impact. **It actually reduces the need to speak anything but English.** Once students have worked out the equivalents, and know what they're expressing and how to do so in English, it's much easier to speak with security and confidence.

Up-to-date, in line with contemporary expert thinking. There's no research to support 'banning' classroom translation (Cook, 2011). Monolingual or English-only teaching is being replaced by an acceptance that all students are involved in a bilingual process. Knowledge of other languages is now seen as an asset in language learning. Trans-languaging and code-switching have moved from acceptable, to inevitable, to desirable.

Besides, the plain fact is that until C1 level, students mentally translate from L1 most new items and complex ideas they wish to express in English, anyway. So why not swim with rather than against the flow? This is one way to bring in translation **without opening the flood gates to lots of L1 in class**.

Best of all, **it advantages the vast majority of non-native teachers**, who are effectively bilingual and able to use this approach easily, playing to their own strengths to tailor locally more relevant classes.

One last example: Which expression of lesson content would you prefer to see as a learner as you arrive in class, 1 or 2?

1 Today's aims
- likes / dislikes
- use / non-use of *the*
- pages *27-28*

2 Today's aims

I love ~~the~~ games.
I don't like ~~the~~ water.
I hate ~~the~~ soccer.

One looks like a science class, no context or examples, just a theoretical shopping list. The other immediately makes the point, you can see the purpose of the forthcoming lesson, what (not) to do and say, at once. Many teachers have been doing this for years. If you haven't yet, try with your same L1 classes. I'm sure you won't look back.

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CONFESSIONS OF AN EFL TEXTBOOK WRITER (BASED IN MEXICO)

PAUL DAVIES

First steps

Let me first dispel any illusions you may have about this series of four articles: it will be nothing like *Confessions of an English Window Cleaner*. And now let me encourage you to read on: there may be some revelations for you.

This series of articles will cover five decades, from 1968 to 2018 – yes, starting from before many, if not most, of you were born. You may ask whether the first two or three decades have any relevance for you now. I think they may have, because I believe the essence of textbook publishing (and therefore writing) has stayed much the same. In fact, some EFL textbooks still in wide use were first published three or four decades ago (*Side by Side*, 1980, Prentice Hall, now Pearson; *Headway*, 1986, Oxford; *Interchange*, 1990, Cambridge). So, let's start, with…

My credentials as an EFL textbook writer

I've co-authored 24 commercially published student's books, and also many workbooks and teacher's guides, most for adults but some

for teenagers. Here they are (omitting textbooks not sold on the open market):

Active Context English. 1971. Brinton, Plumb, White, Davies, Shepherd. Macmillan (3 books)

Junior Active Context English. 1972. Brinton, Davies, Orozco, Plumb, Shepherd, White. Macmillan (3 books)

Broader Context English. 1975. White & Davies. Macmillan (1 book)

Contemporary English. 1979. Rossner, Shaw, Shepherd, Taylor, Davies (Book 1 only). Macmillan

New Panorama: Outlines and *Perspectives*. 1988. Davies & Pearse. McGraw-Hill (just 1 language book, *Outlines*, and 1 skills book, *Perspectives*)

Action! 1996 (revised as *New Action!*, 1999). Davies & Pearse. Oxford University Press (3 books)

Skyline. 2001 (revised as *Sky High*, 2006). Brewster, Davies, Rogers. Macmillan (5 books)

Make It Real! 2017. Davies, with Hernández, Hernández, López. UAEH (18 books, counting the high school version, the UAEH university version, and the international higher education version)

As a consequence of all that, I know a thing or two about writing and publishing EFL textbooks. Note also that, until 2013, other ELT activities (teaching, management, teacher training and consultancy) occupied most of my time and attention, so I have 'user' perspectives on textbooks too.

Getting started

How do EFL (or any) textbook writers get started? In different ways, of course. When I joined the Anglo in January 1967, Ethel Brinton, Walter Plumb and Colin White (respectively Director of Studies and Director General of the Anglo, and British Council lecturer at the

UNAM and ex-Anglo) had already started work on textbooks specifically for the Anglo because they weren't happy with any existing ones. That's one way of starting textbook writing – producing books for your own ELT institution. In 1968 they invited me to join the project as a 'junior author'. That's another way of starting – being invited to join an existing project.

One thing that helped me get that invitation was that I'd written sets of 'English Notes' for my students at the Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, where I'd worked for two years before joining the Anglo. Like several English teachers at that university, I'd had the notes mimeographed (no photocopying then) and stapled and I'd sold them to the students instead of having them buy a much more expensive textbook or not use any printed material at all. Ethel and Walter had seen those notes and they were probably among the things that helped me get a branch director job at the Anglo in 1967.

Another way of getting started is being invited by a publisher because… well, because they've identified you as a potentially good EFL textbook author, or one of their existing authors or publishing staff have recommended you, or you're well-known in an ELT market the publisher is interested in.

Anyway, back to the Anglo and that textbook project, *Active Context English* or *ACE*. By 1969-70, Anglo students in basic level courses (over 15,000 of them) were all using pilot editions of the *ACE* books, printed and sold by the Anglo. Then Macmillan heard about the project and approached us with the proposal of publishing the books commercially. Could we say no? Of course not.

To understand how *ACE* was written it's important to know that it didn't arise just out of dissatisfaction with published textbooks and an urge to write alternative material. It arose also from an approach to ELT that had been developing in the Anglo over several years, from classroom experience and from a lot of reading. Although this was when Applied Linguistics as such was in its infancy and before there were any BAs specifically in ELT in the UK and USA, let

alone Mexico, there was a lot written about or related to ELT: Fries and Lado, among other Americans, and Firth and Hornby, among other Britons.

The Anglo writing team based its work particularly on Firth and others' ideas about 'context of situation', along with the Behaviourist view of language learning as habit formation, which pervaded both American and British ELT at that time (in spite of Chomsky's reasoned rejection of that view almost a decade earlier). We (or the three senior authors, with me and Nick following their lead) extended context of situation from the different contexts of use of specific language patterns and expressions to an overall context – the everyday lives of two young women, Kate and her cousin Penny, and their relatives and friends. From that third-person overall context (who Kate, Penny and the others are, where they live, what they do, what they did yesterday, etc., etc.), practice moved to the first-/second-/third-person worlds of the students.

Looking back at those books now, almost fifty years later, they're very old-fashioned and peculiar in their approach: brief episodes of something like a feeble soap opera of everyday life were followed by 'pattern practice' exercises, oral and written. Their presentation was also unimaginative design in black and white, like almost all EFL textbooks back then. And, in spite of our dissatisfaction with published books, *ACE* was not very different from them. Many books had a cast of a few 'characters' appearing in every lesson or unit, and virtually all had contrived dialogues and texts followed by pattern practice.

With Macmillan's marketing know-how, *ACE* sold very well in Mexico, and quite well in parts of Latin America, Japan and other countries. Japan? We weren't writing for places like Japan! But why not sell what you've got wherever you can? Well, there are reasons for not doing so, but that's another matter.

So there we were, published authors, with royalties beginning to come in (12% of published price in those days – not any more now! – though divided among five authors in our case). The extra money

on top of our regular salaries, was great, of course, but it was the reward for working most evenings (and many nights) and weekends on top of quite long hours in our regular jobs, adding up to something like 60-70 hour working weeks. The personal and professional satisfaction was also great, but we'd have written rather different books if we were starting again after they were published (just as second-year university students would write their first-year assignments differently if they had them to do again).

Writing a second series of EFL textbooks

Almost immediately we did get the chance to start again, and I was promoted to full co-author status. They were books for a specific population of students, those in Mexican lower secondary education. In 1972, the Secretaría de Educación Pública English syllabuses for lower secondary schools were up-dated from traditional grammar ones to structural-situational ones – better late than never, but it was late, with notions-functions on the horizon. We all knew the new SEP syllabuses were coming a couple of years earlier, and Macmillan had us working hard on textbooks for them almost as soon as we'd finished the last *ACE* book in late 1970. *Junior Active Context English* (*JACE*) was published in 1972.

The books had a cast of characters and a story-line (or series of episodes), like *ACE*. The characters were Canadian teenagers (about two years older than most Mexican lower secondary school students) – that is, in North America but not the USA, which was not universally loved in Mexico. The texts were shorter and (we hoped) more natural than in *ACE*. The student's books had texts and oral practice, and full colour illustrations, and there were separate workbooks (which *ACE* didn't have) for vocabulary and written work and extra reading practice. See the 2 pages from near the end of Student's Book 1 at the end of this part of the article.

I think our team of five authors did significantly better with *JACE* than we had with *ACE*, though that was probably a good first effort in the terms of over 40 years ago. We were learning the trade and

becoming professional EFL textbook writers. Certainly, our publisher, Macmillan, saw us as an asset, giving us that second project, and then more (see the next article, and the one after that).

References

If you know little or nothing about Charles Fries', Robert Lado, J. R. Firth and A. S. Hornby (we're talking up to over 80 years ago here!), you may want to look them up on the Internet. Or you may prefer to let them rest peacefully in Applied Linguistics and ELT history

Part 2: The end of the beginning

In the first part of this series I wrote about my first effort at EFL textbook writing as a co-author of *Active Context English* (Macmillan, 1971), and what I consider a better second effort with *Junior Active Context English* (Macmillan, 1972). Those two projects involved me also in EFL textbook promotion.

Publishers expect their authors to promote the books they've written, if asked to. So, from time to time, we authors of *ACE* and *JACE* gave promotional and training sessions for English teachers and visited institutions using or thinking of using our books. That put us in touch with a wide range of teachers and let us see inside institutions of different types with ELT, including schools.

One co-author, Colin White, and I were also sent on a promotional trip outside Mexico, three weeks in Brazil in the summer (winter there) of 1972. Talking with English teachers in another Latin American country and seeing inside some of its ELT institutions revealed many similarities with Mexico and some differences. We went to Rio de Janeiro, Juiz de Fora, São Paulo and Brasilia in the central part of that vast country, Fortaleza, João Pessoa and Recife in the north, and Curitiba towards the south. It was one of my most memorable experiences up to then, making EFL textbook writing even more rewarding!

From Brazil, I went – with my wife and 2½-year-old daughter, who'd joined me for a week in Rio – to England to do an MA in Linguistics at Reading University. They hadn't started an Applied Linguistics MA there yet, but had some good applied linguists on the staff. When I returned to Mexico and, later, to EFL textbook writing, I was a changed ELT professional. Let's pick up the story around 1974 with…

Different approaches for specific student populations (and markets)

Macmillan, and we authors, soon realized that its first ever series of books for Mexican schools following the Secretaría de Educación Pública syllabuses, *Junior Active Context English*, didn't respond well to the conditions in most state schools, and it was better for private schools and the few outstanding public ones. In fact, no textbook could produce much successful ELT in most Mexican basic education, as the results showed then – and still do now, though there has been some improvement. Even so, we and Macmillan thought, there must be something better than over-ambitious *JACE*, at one extreme, and unambitious and uninspiring books at the other extreme. Macmillan asked us to explore that possibility.

The *ACE-JACE* authors turned to two colleagues in the Anglo, Richard Rossner and James Taylor, to be the authors, while we remained just as a team of consultants. As well as simplifying everything, Jim and Richard proposed using foreign characters and bits of story only occasionally, along with Mexican characters in different situations, and basing practice more on the students themselves and real world information, both about Mexico and general world knowledge. While still traditional structural-situational (like the official syllabuses), the new series of textbooks, *Basic Junior ACE*, had context-based and learner-centred elements, and even touches of the procedural syllabus of Prabhu.

Published in 1975, *Basic Junior ACE* was very well received in the state school market, perhaps partly because it was black and white

only and self-contained, and therefore cheaper than *JACE*, with its full colour illustrations and separate workbooks. *JACE* continued to sell adequately in its different market and was reprinted in 1975 and again after that. The lesson (which should always have been blatantly obvious) was that different student populations (pedagogically) and different markets (commercially) call for different books.

That lesson applied to the next textbook I co-authored, with Colin White (while Richard and Jim were writing *Basic Junior ACE* – our book, *Broader Context English*, was also published in 1975). It took *Active Context English* (still selling fairly well) to upper intermediate level. It automatically continued the 'different types of textbook for different contexts' approach. Since it was for students that had reached intermediate level, it assumed they needed little or no controlled pattern practice before freer practice and lots of recycling of, and perhaps remedial work on, basic English. Also, they'd be mainly middle class and could relate to a Mexican protagonist (Carlos Mendoza) who's studying in England, and might actually have to face the situations he does: flying to London, going through immigration and customs, staying with a family for a while, finding a flat, studying and living in London, and travelling abroad. And many students might want or need to take a proficiency test like First Certificate, so there was FCE practice material in the book to prepare them for that as well as developing their English in general.

Broader Context English didn't sell anything like as well as *ACE* and the other books, but that was to be expected as upper intermediate is a small market segment, with far fewer students than beginner and elementary levels. It might have sold more with an international group of protagonists, e.g. one from Mexico, Brazil, Turkey and Japan, rather than a single Mexican. The lesson for would-be EFL textbook writers, if there is one, is perhaps 'If you're going to write just one textbook and it's intermediate level, make it very international'. After *Broader Context English* was published, I had a couple of years without textbook writing. Wonderful – free evenings and weekends! Then there was a new project, and…

Disagreement, frustration, and a commercially successful book

Co-authors (and editors when there's an active one) have to work together and agree on an approach and on specific material, but disagreements, sometimes terminal, are not uncommon in EFL textbook writing and publishing. All the projects I'd been involved in had been blessed with a very high level of agreement, but that new one wasn't – at least on my side, perhaps largely my fault.

In 1977 or early 78, Macmillan proposed a replacement for *ACE*, which seemed to have peaked and be heading for a sharp decline in sales. Five of us put our names forward for the project. I was enthusiastic (with two young daughters, more income would be useful – royalties can be taken for granted), and the project could allow me to use some of the ideas from my MA. The two previous projects hadn't offered that because one was tied to official syllabuses, and the other was beyond basic grammar.

The five of us set to work on *Contemporary English*, a 6-book series for adults. The others tended towards something on the same methodological lines as *Basic Junior ACE* – structural-situational-behaviourist, with students practising each structure by 'talking about' given information, real world general knowledge, and their own lives. I'd done my MA in 1972-3, we were then in 1978, and I wanted to move towards a new approach – which, unfortunately, I didn't have clear – that would take into account Chomsky's 1959 theory of Language Acquisition (as opposed to programmatic teaching-learning of one structure after another), Selinker and Pit Corder's 1972+ theory of Interlanguage (involving errors and gradual approximation to the new language), and Wilkins' 1972+ proposal of Notional-Functional Syllabuses (David Wilkins had taught on the Reading MA, and he later contributed to the work leading up to the CEFR).

I pushed my ideas, such as they were, in the planning meetings, but as those moved on to the plan, and that moved on to actual work on the first book, it became clear that I hadn't been forceful or convincing enough in making my case. I suspect I was also seen to

be wrong about the target market and the majority of teachers at that time in Mexico. So, when published in 1979, *Contemporary English 1*, the only book I worked on, contained mainly traditional structural-situational presentation and practice material. One 'original' feature was reading at the end of each lesson containing examples of the grammar to be focused on in the following lesson – 'pre-exposure' for possible embryonic twitches of 'acquisition'. Another 'original' feature was an 'Interaction Sequence' in each lesson, with communicative functions like 'requesting actions', 'inviting', 'accepting/declining' and 'apologising'. The other authors had agreed to include these as a concession to me and my insistence that notional-functional-communicative ELT was on its way, and had already arrived outside Mexico.

Be that as it may, my co-authors, and Macmillan, were right about the market and most teachers: *Contemporary English* sold well, in Mexico, anyway. The fact that the books were still in black and white and, therefore, relatively cheap may also have been a factor, but I suspect there's a market for books (necessarily with colour now) rather like that even today. Well, let's be frank, there is, isn't there?

An innovative project, problems, and food for thought

The next EFL textbooks I wrote were with a new co-author, Eric Pearse. We tried to do what I'd been proposing (not very clearly, perhaps) for *Contemporary English*, i.e. respond to the new developments in ELT theory and practice, which by then, the early 1980s, had generated the first few Communicative Language Teaching/notional-functional textbooks. In fact, we tried to do even more than that and attend to different sectors of the adult market, from 'basic' to 'privileged' ones.

There were two books at each level, one a fairly slim but complete textbook on notional-functional lines that could be used alone in "courses with limited time or other restricting conditions", the other a skills book that could be used alone where "students have a basic knowledge of English grammar but need to develop communication

skills" or where teachers prefer to do their own language-focused work and only need a skills book. In addition, where there was time, the two books would "together constitute a truly complete course in English"; in that case, a skills book – not a workbook – complementing the main (if slim) student's book, would clearly put the emphasis on communication. An interesting idea, in pedagogical and commercial terms, right?

Perhaps, but we had problems from start to finish. The publisher that had taken on the project, Nelson, ran into financial difficulties and had to cancel many projects, including ours. About three years later McGraw-Hill took up the project, and the first pair of books (*New Panorama: Outlines 1* and New *Panorama: Perspectives 1*) were eventually published in 1988. However, McGraw-Hill saw the innovative project as a gamble with a risk of losses (the EFL textbook market had changed over the past decade and was changing still, but even so…). They prepared for the risk by producing the first, exploratory edition cheaply, in black and white and without photographs. They were right – the books sold poorly, and the series started and ended at Level 1. Of course, I insist that the poor sales were partly because of the cheap presentation – just joking!

I didn't write another EFL textbook for eight years after that. It was sweet relief (most evenings and weekends for myself and the family), but the continual decrease in royalties wasn't so sweet. From time to time, as I worked hard and enthusiastically for the Anglo in different posts and activities, and then for the British Council, I would think about the many lessons about EFL textbook writing that I'd had, in case I ever wrote more books.

When I did eventually write again, the new era in EFL textbooks that I'd seen on the horizon before it came was well established. Read all about it in the next article in this series!

References

If you know little or nothing about Noam Chomsky and his Language Acquisition theory, Larry Selinker and Stephen Pit

Corder and their Interlanguage theories, and David Wilkins and his work on Notional-Functional Syllabuses (we're still talking up to over half a century ago here!), you may want to look them up on the Internet. Or you may prefer to let them rest peacefully in Applied Linguistics and ELT history.

Part 3: New era, similar challenges

In the second article in this series I wrote about how, after my first two enthusiasm-driven projects, I came to see textbook writing as a more complex and controversial matter, not the fairly straightforward one it had seemed. With involvement in four more projects (as consultant in one and co-author in three), I fully realized that textbooks for different contexts (or market sectors) may need to be not just different, but radically different. I also realized that there's bound to be controversy when an established approach (structural-situational in the late 1970s) is on its way out of favour and a new one (notional-functional at that time) is on its way in. And I realized that the EFL textbook market tends to be conservative and reject innovative products until they're unstoppable, at least in certain contexts.

Seven or eight years went by before I started writing another EFL textbook, and by then it was a new era. Notional-functional theory and Communicative Language Teaching were solidly established, so solidly that the Mexican Secretaría de Educación Pública syllabuses for lower secondary schools had been revised on notional-functional lines in 1993. In 1995, Eric Pearse and I were commissioned by Oxford University Press to write books for the new syllabuses, even though it was late in the day (other publishers had brought out their new textbooks in 1993 or 1994). It was a very good experience for us both, though it reminded me again that, for authors and publishers, there may be different…

Types and degrees of success in EFL textbook writing

As well as coming out late (in 1996, when schools had already selected new textbooks 2 or 3 years earlier and were used to working with them), our series of textbooks, *Action!*, was a new departure for OUP: they'd never produced books for Mexican state secondary schools before. Working out what kind of books to write, we ended up going in a similar market direction to *Junior Active Context English* – aiming at the upper half of the state school market and bottom quarter of the private school market. OUP's concern with quality wouldn't allow them to produce something of lesser quality, trying to gain sales through 'dumbed-down' content and low price. In fact, OUP put really high quality editing, design and printing into the books, as the examples below show.

For our part, Eric and I tried to make the books 'feel' different from traditional 'heavy and boring' Mexican lower secondary school English textbooks, starting with the title, *Action!*, and continuing that film theme with *Clip* (1, 2, 3…), *Take* (1, 2, 3…) and *In Focus* instead of *Lesson*, *Exercise* (or *Task*) and *Checkpoint* (or *Review*). There was also an on-going cartoon series, and more reading than usual.

From the point of view of OUP, it turned out that we hadn't pitched the books quite right – they would have liked much higher sales. But sales weren't bad, and the series went to a second edition and continued selling for years. From our point of view as authors, we achieved most of what we'd wanted to and were very proud of the books (as well as being delighted with the superb editing, design and printing OUP gave them). We were also perfectly happy with the royalties!

You could say that *Action!* (with the second edition, *New Action!*) was more of a success for the authors than for the publishers, who must have looked a little enviously at state secondary school books that sold more. But "comparisons are odious", and leaving them aside, *Action!* was something of a success for authors and publisher, and, I hope, for good teachers. Certainly, if I were to write new books for the SEP syllabuses (which I definitely won't), I'd write something

quite similar. I like to think that *Action!* was a series of books used by many successful teachers, whose students were among the few in Mexican state schools that really began learning English there and later joined the small percentage of adult Mexicans with a functional command of English. A vain dream, perhaps, but a better one for me than getting more royalties from books sold to the great majority of school students who learn little or no lasting English at school.

Back to textbooks for adults (and back to Brazil)

My next EFL textbook project was for adults again, and it started about five years into the new century, the 21st. Like my first project, I was invited to join one that was already at the tentative writing stage (this time to replace someone who 'hadn't worked out' – textbook writing isn't for everyone). It took me back to Macmillan after some 25 years with other publishers (including two books for teachers – *Success in English Teaching* with OUP and *The Language in English Teaching* with Richmond). My previous experiences with Macmillan had been mostly good, and this one was to be even better. Our publishing director, Sue Jones, was very progressive, as was our editor, John Walkman, and, given a green light, and even encouragement, we authors, Simon Brewster, Mickey Rogers and myself 'really went for it'.

Went for what? Well, for real 21st century communicative language teaching material. In the books, that meant two pages of communicative skills activities at the beginning of each unit before any focus on grammar, then an inductive awareness-raising approach to focus on language when it came (four pages, including some skills activities), and another two pages of communicative skills activities at the end of each unit.

We produced a very 'communicative' series of books (*Skyline*, second edition *Sky High*), with an inductive approach to grammar, but at an ELT congress in Mexico I was reminded of the fact that EFL textbook writers propose, but teachers dispose. A woman came up to

me smiling and said, "I love your books, *Skyline*! I absolutely love them! What I do is I present and practise the grammar first, and then I go to the book and work with that material. I love it!" So much for textbooks determining teaching approaches! Well, we've always known that some teachers turn communicative textbooks into audio-lingual or even grammar-translation classes, and others forced to use audio-lingual books turn them into communicative classes, haven't we?

The series was well received – i.e. sold very well! – in Mexico, and in Latin America, especially Brazil. It was also the basis for an Asian edition, *Synergy*, and an edition for the Arabic world, *Flying High*. I was the lucky author to be sent to Brazil on five 2- or 3-week trips to promote the books. It was wonderful to return to almost all the places I'd been to back in 1972, and to go to a dozen or so new places, including Belém in the far north and Porto Alegre in the far south (about 4,000 kilometres between them). Whenever possible (certainly when I had a Saturday or Sunday in a city) I explored the places I went to, sometimes walking miles looking at things between beers (or, occasionally, caipirinhas). Those trips were for me great perks of being an EFL textbook writer, though people tell me the charm tends to wear off when you travel around the world every year, as some authors do.

I was beyond normal retirement age when the last of the second edition books (*Sky High*) came out in 2006. I did some more promoting after that (in Mexico, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama and Peru), but I thought I was definitely done with EFL textbook writing. However, destiny dictated that I wasn't.

Seven years later, in 2013, the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo made me an offer I couldn't refuse – well, I tried to refuse it two or three times, but it was too interesting and deliciously challenging not to do it. With co-authors from the UAEH, I planned, wrote and edited a series of books for the university's Prepas (upper secondary schools) and another series for university undergraduates. The latter was published in an international edition, *Make It Real! English for Higher Education in Latin America*, in

2017, with an accompanying online platform, including ESP material. The project was perhaps the most satisfying of my ELT life (though I can't complain about a lack of satisfying projects). As the title suggests, the series has about as much learner-centredness as published textbooks can achieve – "English for higher education in Latin America", not for Japanese, Turkish or other adults of all kinds. Of course, in the final analysis, learner-centredness is in the hands of teachers.

In the last article in this series of four, I'll put down my final thoughts on EFL textbook writing and publishing based on my 50 years of experience in the field, as well as some thoughts on textbook selection and use.

Part 4: Summing up

In the three previous articles in this series I wrote about my half-century of experience in writing EFL textbooks (lots of them), and a bit about related roles – consultant, editor and promoter. I mentioned also being for many years (well, three decades) a language centre director and classroom teacher, which is the ultimate perspective on textbooks – their selection, use and evaluation in practice. In this final article, I'll sum up my observations on EFL textbooks under two general thoughts: "Good (and bad) EFL textbooks are the product of many actors and factors" (i.e. It's complicated), and "Even the best EFL textbooks aren't the main key to best learning outcomes" (i.e. It's teachers that teach, not textbooks).

1 Good (and bad) EFL textbooks are the product of many actors and factors

The main actors determining the nature and quality of EFL textbooks are:

Publishers. These are usually commercial companies, but sometimes institutions, like universities or ministries of education. They're composed (or should be) of ELT publishing experts including project managers (called 'publishers' within publishing companies),

editors, and marketing and sales staff. Publishers usually have the initial, main and final say on everything in each textbook project.

Writers. Some write only one book or series, some two or three, and some many, perhaps for different publishers (like me). Most do EFL textbook writing as a secondary activity (with teaching, teacher training, applied linguistics, etc., as their main activities), but a few live mainly off EFL textbook writing. Writers can have a very big say in a textbook project if the publisher allows that, but sometimes they have to produce material according to strict guidelines from the publisher/editor.

Users. ELT coordinators and EFL teachers, who select and reject textbooks, determine their commercial success or failure (i.e. their sales) and influence the types of books publishers offer. Of course, sales aren't always a good measure of quality (some best-selling books are used mainly where few students actually learn English), but textbooks that sell very well tend to become models for future projects of most publishers, who identify markets and market segments as generally 'conservative', 'progressive', 'grammar-focused', 'communication-focused, etc.

Obviously, commercial publishers are all in business, seeking profits, but they vary considerably in their orientations and policies (or business plans). Some publishers are very short-term commercial, sticking to conservative books for large conservative markets, or safe bets on smaller market segments that are virtually captive or nobody else is attending to. They're "purveyors of old methodology", seldom if ever "promoters of state-of-the-art methodology".

Other publishers have longer term visions and business plans. They too usually have some conservative textbooks, often including one or more that were first published over a decade ago and are still selling well, all of which guarantee reliable income. But they also take risks on some quite progressive textbooks, usually based on predictions of what the market will be open to, or actually demand, in coming years. Some of these progressive books don't sell well (though publishers usually manage to lose little or no investment and actu-

ally make some profit), but some do, and a few eventually become the books that are still selling well one, two or more decades after they were first published, perhaps with a changed title or with "Second Edition" or "Third Edition" attached.

Overall, publishers produce many more conservative textbooks than progressive ones (whatever the blurb on the back cover says – "communicative", "task-based", "learner-centred" – ha ha!), and that's largely because markets tend to be conservative, especially in regions like Latin America (as opposed to parts of Europe). There's still some demand for textbooks like the better structural-situational or early CLT ones published in the 1970s and 80s (that is, books published today very like those old PPP books).

Which brings us to writers: someone has to write the old-fashioned or conservative textbooks still published today. There's a market for them, publishers see the market, and they seek and contract writers to produce manuscripts. Those writers are either very conservative ELTers themselves (probably in the best possible way if a decent publisher has contracted them), or they put their progressive inclinations (or even convictions) to one side while they put their nose to the grindstone, follow the publisher's conservative template, and make some money.

Of course, there isn't a border wall between conservative and progressive: even very progressive ELT includes, or admits, a lot that's virtually timeless ELT good sense, creativity, pragmatics and so on, and even very conservative ELT may admit some innovative and imaginative elements. The writers of generally, and perhaps openly, conservative textbooks sometimes surprise us with their imaginative and effective handling of what they had to do (you could say "This book would have been fantastic if it had been published in 1990… and it's not that bad today"). And the writers of textbooks that purport to be progressive sometimes disappoint us with material for clearly conservative ELT (though that may be because their publisher and editor twisted their arms or their original manuscripts somewhat).

Textbook writing nirvana for authors who have themselves reached a progressive state of ELT, including learner-centredness, is when a project is intended to be progressive and for a fairly well-defined learner population, and the publisher and editor are strongly behind it. That could be, for example, a progressive intermediate level business English book, or a series of books, starting at beginner level, for Latin American teenagers in decent learning conditions (3+ hours per week, groups of under 30 students, trained teachers with B2+ English, etc.). Who should the writers of such textbooks be? Logically, people who have considerable experience in teaching those types of classes and/or considerable experience observing them.

That often isn't the case, and simply can't always be with internationally sold textbooks. Some of the books you use or have used here in Latin America may have author information on the back cover like this: "Jane Smith has extensive experience teaching in schools in Switzerland, Qatar, Thailand and Japan" (all expensive private schools, of course, and Jane has no experience at all with Latin American students). Did any of the teachers in Japan that used the first books I co-authored know I and my co-authors had experience only in Spain (just me) and Mexico?

Which brings us to teachers and others who select and use textbooks. In 1811 Joseph de Maistre wrote "*Toute nation a le gouvernement qu'elle mérite*", and there's some truth in saying that teachers in general get the textbooks they deserve. If most teachers (or coordinators and ELT managers) want conservative textbooks focused mainly on and working deductively through the grammar of English, with 'communicative' tasks largely at the service of that grammar work, rather than more communicative, inductive and learner-centred textbooks, then publishers will mainly publish and sell such books (which is, in fact, what happens). Teachers who want to take a more communicative, inductive and learner centred approach have to search hard and pray for more appropriate books, or adapt and supplement the least conservative books they can find, dissatisfied though they may be with them.

2 Even the best EFL textbooks aren't the magic key to best learning outcomes

"Teach the language, not the book", says the old ELT adage. Indeed, textbooks should be, and be used as, aids and resources only. Perhaps based on that, some EFL teacher training courses pay little or almost no attention to textbooks (which is a pity because textbooks can be very useful when well used, or they can be a bad influence to be resisted). Nonetheless, many teachers use their textbooks as sacred scriptures, sometimes through mistaken conviction ("This is an excellent textbook and it gives me all and only what I need"), and sometimes through that and laziness, or laziness alone ("I go through the book task by task, page by page, lesson by lesson, and it works well"). Some publishers even produce textbooks specifically for such unthinking or lazy teachers: the material consists of a series of PPP (presentation-practice-production/skills) sequences which teachers can go through without planning at all or thinking much.

But even in the above cases different teachers interpret the sacred (or convenient) scripture differently. Some do memorization and recitation of bits of the scripture, others go into grammar-translation extension work, others into structural situational extension work, and others into CLT-PPP extension work. Between what writers, editors and publishers intended in a textbook and the course it's used in comes the teacher's use and interpretation of the book. The same textbook may be used in very different courses, and ELT is realized through courses, not textbooks, even when teachers think they're using the book as the course.

In whatever context (a semi-bilingual primary school, a regular secondary school, a technical institute, a language centre, etc.), the best possible learning outcomes (and the worst ones), don't appear to come mainly from the textbooks used but from the teachers and the learners. As mentioned above, the same textbook may be used in very different courses and, even in the same type of context, some courses may have very good learning outcomes while others have very bad ones. In other words, using the same textbook, one teacher,

or group of teachers in an institution, may create engaging, communicative, practical courses clearly related to the students and their needs and get their collaboration, while another teacher or group of teachers may create heavy, 'academic', unrealistic courses unrelated to the students and their needs and fail to engage them and get their collaboration. In both cases the teacher or group of teachers have probably used, omitted and supplemented the textbook material, but in very different ways. In short, teachers are much more significant (for better or worse) than textbook writers and publishers.

Summing up and concluding

Teachers are much more important for good learning outcomes than textbooks (or 'programmes', etc.), and up-dated, progressive teachers are generally more effective than out-dated, conservative ones. However, many of the latter are effective teachers because effective teaching doesn't depend only on the most solid applied linguistics theories and latest methodological trends but also on virtually timeless ELT good sense, creativity, pragmatics and so on, and on teacher personality, especially the ability to relate to students (and some progressive teachers get poor results because of that).

After teachers (and teaching-learning conditions, some of which in Latin America and elsewhere, are virtually impossible to work in), textbooks can be very important. They can provide hard-working teachers with little time to plan lessons fully with a good basis to work from and produce 'express' lesson plans. They can give teachers with little or no training but good English acceptable activities and methodology (both through the student's book and the teacher's guide) and even help turn them into decent teachers without ever taking a full EFL teacher training programme. Progressive textbooks can push teachers professional development forwards and stop them from stagnating in the ELT of their initial training (perhaps 20 or 30 years before today's date). To do all that, textbooks have to be quite good, of course.

There are many good international EFL textbooks, but local teachers have to adapt and supplement them a lot if they're to give their students the best possible courses and get the best possible learning outcomes. A given textbook can't be used appropriately in almost exactly the same way in Japan, Thailand, Turkey, Germany, Mexico and Brazil, or even in Tijuana, Guadalajara and Tapachula, can it?

The best textbooks for definable student populations are books written, from experience, for those specific student populations, i.e. textbooks that are, as far as possible, learner-centred. Good international ESP textbooks, especially from upper elementary level onwards, when native language matters less and less, are such books – English for Business, or Medicine, or Travel and Hospitality, or Engineering, etc. Especially at beginner and elementary level, textbooks written for learners with certain native languages or language families may be useful – learners who speak Arabic, or Malay-Indonesian, or Chinese languages, or, of course, Latin American Spanish and Portuguese. And textbooks for regions with different likely uses of English: I've repeatedly contrasted Europe (where many people travel from and to Britain and Ireland, other countries where English is the main lingua franca, and study, work or retire abroad within Europe) and Latin America (where very few people travel, study, work or retire abroad, and English is used mainly for higher studies or training and work).

The ideal textbook for Latin American medical students starting English again at beginner-elementary level would be one combining all the above, considering native language (Spanish or Portuguese), likely general use of English (mainly for study-work-professional updating in their own country, not travel and stays abroad), and definite specific use of English (for medicine). For most publishers, that might mean too much market segmentation, not commercially convenient. But a Mexican university has turned EFL textbook publisher and done it – the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo.

In my last five years of ELT work, I had the great good fortune to be the editor and main author of *Make It Real! English for Higher Education in Latin America*, which is what its title says and has ESP material for six professional areas (including health sciences) on its online platform. I was paid fees for my work and get no royalties, so I'm not mentioning this textbook series out of pecuniary self-interest. No, my interest and hope is that commercial (or Latin American university) publishers will start producing more EFL textbooks specifically for Latin America, and for important student populations within Latin America. I'd love *Make It Real! English for Higher Education in Latin America* to help push EFL textbooks in Latin America towards more regional context-based and learner-centred material.

DEVELOPING AN ELT PLATFORM FOR LATIN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

JORGE HERNÁNDEZ

Background

First, let me clarify that I am not an ELT professional, but a computer systems professional who has now worked for over 6 years with ELT professionals. They now know more about Internet platforms than they used to, and I now know quite a lot about ELT, especially ELT material – and my English has improved!

The ELT platform that is the subject of this article was developed originally to accompany two series of English textbooks produced by and only for the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo, Mexico: *Make It Real! Junior* (for the UAEH's upper secondary schools or Prepas) and *Make It Real! Professional* (adapted with some more academic elements and English for UAEH undergraduate students). The textbooks and platform were part of a very ambitious project started at the UAEH in 2013, with the first book published at the end of that year.

The platform first complemented those two series of textbooks, with partly different versions for *Make It Real! Junior* and *Make It Real! Professional*, but later it was developed to complement an adapted and extended version of *Make It Real! Professional* for use outside the

UAEH, *Make It Real! English for Higher Education in Latin America*. That title explicitly conveys the learner-centered and context-centered nature of the material in the books and on the platform.

The development of *Make It Real! Online*

At the start of 2014, with the publication of the second level, the *Make It Real!* textbooks seemed to be well on their way, but the online platform was not. I was working alone, a one-man technical 'team', and without a single ELT person working on the material that would be the content of *Make It Real! Online* – they were all far too busy with the textbooks. So, when the platform was officially presented at the beginning of 2014, the only content available was the listening comprehension recordings for Teacher's Guides and Student's Books in MP3 format.

I'd like to say that the situation improved over the following months, but that was not the case. Due to budget and staff limitations, I was still alone. But then I started to form a team out of people from the UAEH Licenciaturas in ELT and Graphic Design who were doing their 'social service' prior to graduating. We developed some grammar and vocabulary activities for the platform to accompany the textbooks that had been published by the middle of 2014. That material stayed online for only 6 months, for obvious reasons: it was not up to standard for the *Make It Real!* project, for which experienced ELT professionals were necessary.

It sounds like a disastrous start to *Make It Real! Online*, doesn't it? I'd be lying if I denied that, but that year was actually very useful. It allowed me to examine the offer of language learning platforms on the Internet, note the latest trends and technology, the advantages and disadvantages of the tools used and available, and try out different things, all of which contributed to the development of *Make It Real! Online* in the following years.

In the last part of 2014, I developed the final structure of the platform and, at last, an experienced ELT professional was hired to produce material for *Make It Real! Online*. It was still an enormous

challenge and extremely hard work for the two of us because we started 3 or 4 levels behind the textbooks, which continued to move ahead, but at least we now had a defined framework for *Make It Real! Online*. With what I had developed technologically for the project, and the material my ELT colleague produced, slowly, level by level, we began to give students using the platform a system of grammar, vocabulary, listening and reading activities that was easy to use, of good pedagogical quality, accessible and, above all, an appropriate complement to the *Make It Real! Professional* textbooks they were using.

By the beginning of 2016, *Make It Real! Online* covered the first four levels (i.e. books) of *Make It Real! Professional*, A1.1, A1.2, A2.1 and A2.2. The material consisted of a total of 16 units (4 for each book) of vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension and listening comprehension activities, including 64 vocabulary activities, 64 grammar activities, 32 reading activities, and 32 listening activities.

We were both helped and challenged by the development of the platform initially for those original series of textbooks, *Make It Real! Junior* and *Make It Real! Professional* (2013-17) and then for the new version of the latter, *Make It Real! English for Higher Education in Latin America* (2017 until now). That extra series of textbooks meant extra work for us, but it also gave us the opportunity to improve the platform on the basis of over 3 years' experience.

In 2017, the first two books of *Make It Real! English for Higher Education in Latin America* were published for use outside the UAEH and we began to work on **mironline** (see below), but *Make It Real! Professional* continues to be used today in the UAEH along with *Make It Real! Online*. At the end of 2018, *Make It Real! Online* had almost 9,000 UAEH undergraduate student users, and almost 400 English teacher users (there is a teacher section on the platform, which, among other things, enables teachers to monitor the use of the platform by their students). In addition, the partly different version of *Make It Real! Online* for the *Make It Real! Junior* textbooks had almost 18,000 users in the UAEH and associated upper secondary schools (Prepas).

The development of *mironline*

When it was decided to produce a version of the *Make It Real! Professional* textbooks adapted for use outside the UAEH throughout Latin America, that is, *Make It Real! English for Higher Education in Latin America*, it was a good time to develop an improved and extended version of the platform.

The platform team was strengthened, with other computer systems people working with me at last, and a second ELT materials writer. We had growing experience in developing and managing *Make It Real! Online*, using feedback from UAEH English teachers and students, and a greater understanding of how other English language practice platforms worked. In fact, technical development of a new of version of the platform, *Make It Real! Online 2.0*, had started at the beginning of 2016, so, in 2017, when the idea of *Make It Real! English for Higher Education in Latin America* was conceived, it was simply turned into **mironline** and developed further.

We had a platform that worked well, but we wanted more. Technology develops day by day, and **mironline** has aimed at engaging students in attractive activities that are close to the applications and systems they interact with in their everyday lives. Students' practice and learning experiences are enriched through technology such as 360 degree photography and video, 3D models, and higher levels of use based on gamification, all provided in a clean, easy to use way.

Like *Make It Real! Online*, **mironline** offers students practice and learning activities with general (and some academic) English related to the textbooks in the areas of grammar, vocabulary, listening and reading. That now constitutes one of two sections on **mironline**, the General English section, the other being the English for Specific Purposes section. The ESP material begins in the very first unit of the first book, A1.1, exploiting the similarities between formal and technical English and Spanish or Portuguese. It has 6 areas: Administration & economics, Agriculture & environment, Computer systems & electronics, Construction & engineering, Health sciences and Humanities & social sciences. The material is organized in

modules, 4 per level, each containing a reading text with a comprehension activity and two related vocabulary activities.

ESP would have been virtually impossible without the platform (too costly and complicated through printed material), and *Make It Real!* would have been distinctly less learner-centered and context-centered.

When you put together the technology and the content of **mironline** you get things like 3D models of the human body to help students in Health Sciences grasp and learn the relevant vocabulary, and 360 degree visits to different biomes for students in Agriculture & environment (a student favorite in the ESP section). As mentioned above, it would have been impossible to offer students that, and much more, without a platform, and without all the work our team put into **mironline**.

There is also a complete platform for teachers attached to **mironline**, enabling them to create an unlimited number of student groups, follow the statistics of use and progress of each student, access all the material for students on **mironline**, access teacher development materials that include video modules, and download listening comprehension recordings and the Teacher's Guide in PDF.

In the short time **mironline** has been online for students (from July 2018 to now, March, 2019), with only 3 levels so far, A1.1, A1.2 and A2.1 (and A2.2 about to go online) it has almost 700 individual student users, over 30 teacher users and 30 groups.

Work in progress

We are currently working on the following improvements and extensions to **mironline**:

- The incorporation of additional digital elements with the aim of helping users enjoy their use of the platform even more and become more autonomous in their learning.

- A component with practice for TOEFL ITP, to be launched in the course of this year, 2019.
- A digital shop, which will enable users to obtain more practice and learning resources, also to be launched in 2019.
- Within the UAEH, **mironline** will probably replace *Make It Real! Online* in the course of this year.

Lessons learned

1 Developing and running a good ELT platform – we trust **mironline** is good! – is extremely demanding, and keeping up with a plan and timetable is likely to be difficult unless conditions are very favorable and resources abundant. The team needs lots of energy and determination.

2 Getting ELT experts and software development experts to work well together is a real challenge, but there are few experiences more enriching than being part of a multi-disciplinary team.

3 The future is now, don't wait for it to arrive. The project confirmed that younger students and teachers in higher education now have a natural connection with technology, and we should take advantage of that to the maximum and use the latest technology to try to overcome the limitations of traditional English language teaching and learning.

4 Everything we develop on a pedagogical platform should be centered on the needs of the users, no matter what our field of expertise is. If you are a software developer, the applications and systems should be specifically for your target users. If you are an ELT materials writer, the same (for example, ESP was a must in our case).

5 Measure, measure, measure. Information is this era's petroleum. You cannot make really appropriate decisions or develop strategies to respond to your students' needs unless you examine and analyze information about their habits and performance. A platform should

include apps and tools that provide teachers with relevant statistics and other information.

6 There are no magic recipes or shortcuts for success with an online platform project. If you want good results, you have to do the essential hard work, and be resilient in the face of obstacles, frustrations and whatever else. If you persist, conscientiously, the rewards will come.

My parting thought: In coming years, expect many surprises in the development of ELT materials and resources made possible by new technology…..

TEAM TEACHING IN A BA IN ELT COURSE, AND IN GENERAL

MARTHA LENGELING & AMANDA WILSON

Consider this scenario: You are a tenured university professor, and you are expecting a large group of trainees next semester in a BA in ELT course on observation. You designed this course and have been teaching it for many years. In a planning meeting, the director of the BA mentions a new professor who needs more teaching hours to fulfill her part-time position. You know the professor because she was your student in the Cambridge University In-Service Course of English Language Teaching (ICELT) where you observed her teaching, and you also directed her thesis in the MA in Applied Linguistics (ELT) at your university. A lightbulb pops in your head and you suggest that she could team teach the observation class with you. You also argue that it would be training for the new professor for when you retire (not long now). The director approves this experimental arrangement and, essentially for administrative reasons, you will be team teaching. The wheels are rolling. Enter Amanda.

Now consider this scenario: You are a professor new to a university BA in ELT program. With a part-time position, you have five classes to teach, all new for you. The director of the Language Department tells you she wants you to team teach one class with a tenured professor, who was your professor both in ICELT, where she observed you teaching, and later in the MA in Applied Linguistics

(ELT), where she was your MA thesis director. You know her both as your teacher and as someone with a lot of experience teaching in the BA. The idea of now team teaching as colleagues is a little daunting, but it may relieve some of your workload and alleviate your feeling of being overwhelmed. As you begin the new semester, your team teaching partner, Martha, suggests keeping a journal about this experiment.

That is how we came to team teach a class. In this article, we will relate the experiences of two teachers working together for a semester as team teachers in a BA in ELT course at a large public university in central Mexico. It is not often the case that one can team teach in Mexican universities, but we were given this opportunity and decided to conduct this experiment as professionally as we could.

Defining 'team teaching'

The term 'team teaching' has been defined in different ways, and in situations ranging from special education teachers working with regular classroom teachers to interdisciplinary teams on a faculty organizing a range of seminars (Anderson & Speck, 1998). For our experiment, we started from Richards and Farrell's (2005) characterization of team teaching as "a process in which two or more teachers share the responsibility for teaching a class", and took that all the way to the idea that "shared responsibility for classroom actions is considered particularly important for the delivery of high-quality instruction by teacher teams" (Krammer et al., 2018). The goal of our experiment was to focus on collaboration and shared responsibility in all aspects of the course, from planning and design, to implementation and evaluation.

As our experience revealed, for that to work well, mutual trust and respect are extremely important, or even essential. Our experience also revealed the effects team teaching can have on teacher development and development of other educational professionals.

Collaboration: 1 + 1 > 2

Teaching of any kind calls for collaboration between teachers and students. Team teaching also requires effective collaboration between teachers in the whole process of teaching a class: without it, there can be conflict, contradiction, and trouble for the teachers and the students. The collaboration should extend from the overall course philosophy, through setting goals and objectives, planning the course and individual lessons, and actual teaching, to assessment and evaluation.

As Richards and Farrell (2005) note, "The shared planning, decision making, teaching, and review that result [from effective collaboration] serve as a powerful medium of collaborative learning." As our semester progressed, the potential for such collaboration to result in something greater than what each individual teacher brought to the table became more and more apparent. Amanda wrote the following in her journal: "Ideally, the sum of what each teacher brings to the class is additive, which benefits the students" (Week 6, AKW Journal). Fortunately, our experience generally followed this formula, where the sum of our ideas created a greater whole, as another of Amanda's entries exemplified:

> Collaborative planning for our LP this week was a nice give and take. I had ideas based on two readings on peer observation and critical friends, and MM had ideas about how to present, and then we were able to collaborate on how to put it together… We can build off of each other's strengths. (Week 5, AKW Journal)

For such collaboration to function well, however, a strong foundation built by both teachers is essential.

Anderson and Speck (1998) point out that "compatible team teachers work together harmoniously by embracing a similar philosophy and vision for the class". Whether such compatibility comes from pre-existing personal beliefs or communication during advanced planning (with the latter perhaps modifying some of the

former and facilitating the embrace of a similar philosophy and vision), our experience revealed compatibility to be important to the success of collaboration and our classes. For effective collaboration to take place we both had to participate frankly and negotiate during our planning meetings.

> We talked over the LP before class, and I felt we moved back and forth easily during class. We both knew the overall plan, and therefore could both jump in, in what seemed a seamless, fluid way. It helps that we have a similar approach to teaching. (Week 3, AKW Journal)

With a shared philosophy and an agreement on the goals and objectives, the value of such collaboration in the classroom can be seen as a benefit to the students.

At the start of the project, we mapped out the entire semester, agreeing on what we wanted to do in a general sense. Then, we met to plan each individual class once a week. This advance planning and mutual agreement allowed us to work collaboratively. When things click between the teachers, as they did in our experience, it can all appear effortless. Amanda reflected on what was for us a high moment of team teaching and described what happened in a class:

> …it was "team teaching" at its best, truly, today. While I led a discussion about the article, MM wrote students' responses on the board, allowing me to concentrate on trying to elicit ideas from the students and clarify when something wasn't clear. (Week 4, AKW Journal)

This kind of collaboration allows teachers to aid and support each other in class, and it can result in a state of *flow* (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990) where teachers work effortlessly together with a mutual goal in mind. It also enables them to do together what a single teacher cannot do alone, complementing each other. In the above example, it included leading a student discussion, clarifying points referring to

ideas on the board as well as the article (Amanda), and listening carefully to students, paraphrasing their ideas on the board with the article in mind, stepping in with an observation at times (Martha).

The benefit of team teaching specifically for the students extends beyond such value-added teaching in the classroom, and the course and lesson planning before it, to assessment and evaluation. One "strength of team teaching is that it can improve evaluation/feedback of students' performance" (Anderson & Speck, 1998). Our experience is reflected in Amanda's following journal entry.

> We collaborated on grading the presentations. MM provided a rubric and we were close in our evaluations, one higher at times then the other, but the averages were results we both seemed satisfied with. (Week 7, AKW Journal)

Evaluation and grading by team teachers requires them to collaborate in the process, sharing and discussing perceptions and views in order to reach more reliable, negotiated grades and feedback. This is obviously better for students than more subjective evaluation and grading by a single teacher, but it requires a greater time commitment from the teachers. Our experience confirms this:

> We can divide the work, but we also need to ensure that the grading is consistent for the students. The challenge is how to do that. If we both grade all of the students' work, instead of reducing the work, it effectively doubles it. (Week 16, AKW Journal)

So, while the use of two pairs of eyes and two brains in evaluation and grading usually improves reliability and consistency significantly, it can often be difficult or almost impossible time-wise. We suggest that team teachers do as much grading as they can together, so long as they have the time to do it carefully, and always consult each other when in doubt. We found that working together on grading made us both more confident in our judgement, and it probably improved our judgement when grading alone.

Trust is key

Our experience showed that collaborating on everything from planning to evaluation is only part of the equation. We have already mentioned the importance of compatibility, which may grow between the teachers from not much, apparently, at first to a lot after some time working together. Another essential ingredient for effective collaboration in team teaching is trust. That requires respect between the teachers, which is built on confidence in the ability and reliability of the other and acceptance of the differences of the other, and a willingness to share responsibility for the class and take responsibility for one's share. Many authors have emphasized this need for "mutual respect" (Anderson & Speck, 1998), "equal participation" (Heath, Carlson, & Kurtz, 1987), and "the sharing of responsibility for the class" (Krammer et al., 2018) in order for team teaching to be successful. Amanda wrote this:

> Benefits of team teaching should be shared responsibility, shared workload, mutual trust, and a sharing of different perspectives. All of this should ultimately benefit the students. The key is a sense of shared trust. Without that, the rest is impossible to attain. (Week 15, AKW Journal)

The word *share* appears a number of times here. It refers to the idea of dividing the work of the two teachers in a way that relies on and promotes trust. Based on our team-teaching experiment, effectively shared experience is grounded in trust and confidence in each other.

Richards and Farrell (2005) report that they "found that it is important for both teachers to have a strong sense of confidence in each other" and identified "trust and mutual respect" as the greatest concern of team teachers. Our experience confirmed these principles:

> Trust is important in team teaching. It involves not only trust that your co-teacher will carry her/his load, will bring ideas to the table, participate in planning the class as well as participate during

> the class. It also involves trust that the co-teacher will not try to undermine you during class with the students. In an ideal situation, co-teachers support each other, both before class—during preparation and planning—and also during class and execution of the plan. (Week 6, AKW Journal)

Trust in team teachers does not mean, however, that both teachers must agree on every aspect of the class. Where true trust exists, differences of teaching perspective and style can be expressed in a way that benefits the students. Mutual trust to agree and disagree allows team teachers to participate fully, recognizing that it is important never to categorically contradict the other teacher but maintain the acceptance of different reasonable opinions. Team teachers should work out any differences that arise in a professional manner in order to obtain their mutual goal in the classroom. Anderson and Speck (1998) say that "an often cited benefit of team teaching is that students gain multiple perspectives because two teachers offer different viewpoints". For different viewpoints to be compared and assessed properly, they need to be debated in honest communication and open negotiation, searching for solid ground, often middle ground, that will result in the best learning experience for the students.

> How co-teachers decide to allocate their class time should be negotiated, to ensure both that the students receive the information they need in the best way possible, and that the load is carried evenly by the teachers. This requires that both teachers participate in creating a lesson plan and sticking to that plan. It requires that both teachers participate equally throughout the lesson. It also requires that on-the-spot changes to a lesson plan—which are inevitable—can be negotiated fairly and with the goal of doing what is best for the students. Team teaching requires consideration. (Week 16, AKW Journal)

Team teachers must be able to react to unexpected things or problems that occur in a class and respond spontaneously, without any

conflict between the teachers, but rather a mutual search for a solution or change of direction. As Richards and Farrell (2005) say:

> When two teachers teach a class, they can learn from each other's strengths when planning and teaching lessons. Each teacher will have different ideas on how to deal with any difficulties in the lesson, as well as a different body of experience to draw on. Their combined degrees of knowledge and expertise are bound to lead to a stronger lesson plan.

Teacher Development

Trusting and supportive team teaching, as described above, creates opportunities to share and discuss ideas honestly, even tentative ones, and to help each other develop. As noted by Brouwer et al (2012), "in successful teacher teams, a negotiation process takes place where such shared responsibilities are brokered… In this context, the concerned teachers start a shared learning procedure where they become familiar with the perspectives and attitudes of their team partner". Richards and Farrell (2005) similarly assert that team teaching "allows teachers to cooperate as equals" and may also include "some elements of a coaching relationship" when teachers' experience levels differ. Teaching teams can, when successful, result in learning opportunities for the teachers. In our case, Martha, as the much more experienced partner, wanted to help Amanda make well-informed, confident decisions and instill trust in her – as discussed above, trust was key. The trust between the two of us teachers was transmitted to the students, providing a positive opportunity for both student and teacher development. Amanda comments on this in her journal: "First time solo in the class. MM has set the groundwork for me to be accepted by the students as one of the teachers, and not to be viewed as *lesser*" (Week 8, AKW Journal). Here we see Amanda at mid-course, half way through the semester, and she reflected frankly how she felt. She had gained the confidence to teach on her own and move forward with the challenge.

In our experience, team teaching was a very useful tool for professional development, not just an improved way of teaching students, in our case trainee English teachers. We both benefited from the experience as teachers and teacher trainers, finding our partner to be a good sounding board and proposer of ideas in all areas and in difficult decision making. Ideally, team teaching creates an even better environment for teacher learning and development than solo teaching. In particular, it may result in faster development for less experienced and less confident teachers, who can learn not only from their own slowly accumulating experiences, but from the experiences of another teacher, perhaps more extensive and almost certainly different in interesting ways. If the team is based on a strong sense of collaboration and trust, as discussed above, the potential for professional growth is strong. In her journal, Amanda reflects on how the benefits of team teaching of a specific class can spill over to other classes: "It is helping me in my other BA classes… what I am learning here, I use elsewhere" (Week 13, AKW Journal). This represented fairly early growth for Amanda in her development as a teacher trainer, and on the other side of the partnership there was a spurt of late growth for Martha.

For us, team teaching was a positive experience and we both felt that we learned from it, but there are problem areas to consider, such as the time commitment and the dependence of effective collaboration on compatibility and trust between the teachers. Our experiment began fortuitously as the solution to an administrative issue, but we quickly saw the potential in it, developed that, and had a unique experience in which we each gained significant value from the other. So, now imagine this new scenario: you are the one being asked to team teach. Would you do it? After our positive experience and understanding both the benefits and costs, we would, with enthusiasm.

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ELT AND… UN CUENTO NAVIDEÑO

PAUL DAVIES

ELT and…

In the December 2019 edition of my old website, www.eltinla.org, just three months before COVID lockdown started and the world changed (though, at the time, I didn't know that was coming), I turned my attention to something I'd read and heard in relation to Mexico's National English Programme: The assertion that being L1-English bilingual was every child's right in the modern world, every child's probable need (and also that, to learn a foreign language well, you have to start as a child). What nonsense, I thought, what pernicious nonsense! And I knew a bit about children's rights and needs, especially in Mexico (and also a bit about foreign language learning).

In December 2007, the newspaper *Síntesis* (of Puebla, Mexico) published a story I wrote about street-working children – kids who often don't even go to school, let alone learn English there, though that wasn't the point of the story. I wrote it while I was still working almost full-time in ELT, but also with Fundación JUCONI, a Puebla-based NGO that works with children and teenagers in street situations and their families. I was the Coordinator of Advocacy, representing JUCONI in RIA (Red por la Infancia y la Adoles-

cencia Puebla) and REDIM (Red por los Derechos de la Infancia en México), generally trying to promote awareness of JUCONI and its mission, and to influence children's rights legislation and public policy. *Síntesis* very generously published articles presenting the different causes of the organizations that belong to RIA – work with children and teenagers without parental care, children and teenagers with disabilities, indigenous children and teenagers, community development for children and teenagers, and health care for children and teenagers. The story was just one of many RIA publications in *Síntesis*.

In November 2019, I decided to use that story, 'Un Cuento Navideño', as part of an article for the December edition of ELTinLA focusing on the politics of ELT in relation to national English programmes in Latin America, especially their appropriateness and their cost (and what some of that could be better spent on – marginalised and disadvantaged children, for example). It was December, the month of Christmas goodwill, and like virtually all human activities, ELT doesn't take place in a void but in the world around us and our students.

Apart from that socially conscious perspective on ELT, from an ELT methodology perspective, you can't just "teach the English language" more or less the same way to everyone and be a successful teacher. You need to take the context of your teaching and of your students and your students' needs into account, and accept that some people don't need or want English.

In ELT planning, especially of national, regional or large scale institutional programmes, the above context-based and learner-centred considerations should be fundamental, and also the competing claims of other areas that require investment of money and time. In some contexts, first language literacy, numeracy and mathematics, information and communication technology skills, and other human development or academic areas may be much more important than English. In the general socio-economic and human rights context, the reduction of poverty, improvement of health care in marginalized and disadvantaged communities, attention to the plight of

street-working and street-living children and adolescents, and other areas compete with ELT for the investment of time and money. ELT doesn't take place in a void: some of what is spent on universal ELT through 6, 9, 12 or more years of school education might be much better spent on something else that's much more important for people.

In the original article, published on ELTinLA in December 2019, the whole story, 'Un Cuento Navideño', followed at this point, along with an appeal: If in this month running up to Christmas you notice any children working or begging or accompanying adults working or begging in the street, a market or other public area, when they should be in school or at home, think about it. If you want to help them and other disadvantaged children, give a bit more this month to an NGO you're already supporting, or look for one in your country online or through recommendations from relatives and friends.

In this adaptation of that article I'll present just two extracts – the beginning and the end of the story – and a summary of the middle, as follows.

Un Cuento Navideño: (con agradecimiento al espíritu de Charles Dickens)

¿Será cierto? ¿Quién sabe? Algunos dicen una cosa, otros dicen otra. El sabelotodo de mi cuñado afirma que ganan entre 600 y 900 pesos al día. ¡Eso es casi lo que gano yo, y mi pobre hijo, Paco, recién titulado como abogado – o sea, por el momento, achichintle con licencia para morir de hambre – ni hablar! Dice (el cuñado, no Paquito) que eso dijo un chavo callejero del DF en una entrevista en la tele. "Lo vimos, Silvia y yo, lo escuchamos en la tele, Miguel." Comprobado, caso cerrado – según él. Pero Elsa Chávez, esa amiga de Lulú, le asegura que de ninguna manera es así, y ella trabaja con la Casa de los… el Hogar del… ¿cómo se llama?...

Así lucubraba Miguel en su Jetta 2004 mientras esperaba ansioso a que cambiara el semáforo a verde antes de que ese muchacho largucho llegara a su carro. No le disgusta a Miguel darles de vez en cuando a esos pobres chavos (si así se ve un joven con ingresos de entre quince y veinte mil pesos mensuales, algo ande muy, muy mal en este mundo), pero le molesta mucho tener el parabrisas medio lavado cuando cambia el semáforo, el chavo trepado en el cofre y los carros de atrás tocándole a todo volumen.

¡Ya cambió el semáforo! Con alivio, Miguel metió la velocidad y avanzó con la manada mecánica, de paso echándole una sonrisa a Lulú sentada a su lado. Ella le regresó una sonrisita diluida, más de lectora de mentes que de buen humor.

¡O no! Los mensos de adelante y los del otro boulevard del cruce han logrado crear un inmenso nudo vehicular. "¡Pendejos!" gruñó Miguel en voz alta.

"Es el nuevo espíritu navideño," comentó Lulú, "– todos quieren aprovechar las grandes ofertas en las tiendas. Cómo ha cambiado la Navidad."

"Sí, sí... ya es otra cosa. ¡Carajo, esto va para largo!"

De repente apareció, del lado de Lulú, una manita que dejó un esponjazo de agua sucia y jabón en el parabrisas y luego una carita en la ventanilla, pidiéndole a Lulú permiso para proceder con el trabajo. "Ándale, mi hijito," le dijo Lulú, sonriendo. "¿Seguro que alcanzas?"

"Mi hermano sí," le contestó el chamaquito mientras seguía limpiando lo que podía, y ya estaba ahí el hermano largucho del lado de Miguel, alcanzando bien hasta medio parabrisas. Pronto terminaron juntos el trabajo, y muy bien hecho por cierto. El mayor se fue buscando más clientes en la multicola de cuatro carriles (sin éxito, notó Miguel). Mientras tanto, Lulú sacó de su bolsa una moneda – ¡de diez pesos no más! – para darle al chamaquito. Él tomó la moneda con una sonrisa amplia y se quedó viéndole a Lulú. Ya no habría más trabajo hasta destrabarse el tráfico.

"¿Cuántos años tienes?" le preguntó Lulú.

"Diez." Parecía más bien de siete u ocho años, pero probablemente decía la verdad. No era de los que, como Paco y Mariana, a los catorce, quince o dieciséis años iba a ganar en estatura a sus papás – aunque el hermano mayor del chamaquito… pero quizás tenía otro padre…

"¿Por qué no estás en la escuela hoy, Jesús?" preguntó Lulú. Parece que había averiguado su nombre mientras Miguel estaba distraído, pensando.

"Ya no voy."

"¿No? ¿Sabes leer?"

"Más o menos."

"¿Esto qué dice?" le preguntó Lulú, pasándole un volante que le había dado una chava entre los varios trabajadores de la calle que había en ese cruce, ofertando múltiples servicios y productos, muchos de estos, por supuesto, navideños, emanados del ingenio mexicano y de la "industria ligera" asiática.

"Dice… dice sobre un restorán." Ahí estaba la foto en el volante.

"Y tu hermano, ¿cuántos años tiene? ¿Sabe leer?"

"Sabe... mejor que yo. Tiene quince años. Sabe muchas cosas. Hace malabares con naranjas."

"Vaya – eso no lo puedo hacer yo. Soy muy torpe." Ya se había destrabado el tráfico y Miguel esperaba ahora pasar el cruce. "¡Feliz navidad, Jesús!" le dijo Lulú.

"Gracias, señora. ¡Feliz navidad!"

"Feliz navidad," murmuró Miguel al pasarle al hermano de Jesús, quien se había adelantado un poco.

"…navida'," respondió el joven, sin expresión alguna en la cara.

Summary of the middle of the story:

During the traffic jam, Miguel thinks about street kids more deeply than he ever has before, and then surprises Lulú with his sympathetic comment about Jesús and Juan when they eventually move off: "Well, at least they have each other."

The story then moves on to Miguel and Lulú's Christmas with their son and daughter, aged 22 and 19, in the rather posh home of Lulú's brother, Roberto (the same one who insists that street vendors and beggars, including children, make small and sometimes big fortunes, and without paying any taxes!), along with six other members of the family, covering three generations. It's a typical Mexican middle class affair, in a roomy and comfortable house, with all the food, drink and everything else they could wish for. It's marred a little when Roberto's small son breaks a Bohemian crystal vase and Roberto flies briefly off the handle and almost hits little Luis, before pulling himself back into the role of loving and ever-patient father, and also by a discussion about street children.

In that discussion, some statistics are also woven into the narrative (Lulú quoting a friend of hers who works in an NGO attending poor children and families – coincidence, coincidence): There are 173,000 homes just in the State of Puebla with earth floors, 5.6% of homes in the state don't have piped water, 21% don't have drainage, almost 2% of live-born children die before one year of age, 34% of children live in municipalities with high rates of malnutrition, 4% of children between 6 and 12 don't attend school, etc. Lulú has an amazingly, a frankly unbelievably, good head for statistics! But that was the point of the story in *Síntesis* – disturbing but potentially very useful facts. And it's the point here now.

The story then ends by going back to Jesús and Juan.

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En otro extremo de la ciudad, en sus afueras semi-pavimentadas, Jesús y Juan (su hermano mayor), sus dos hermanas, el bebé, y su

mamá (y, afortunadamente, no el segundo "esposo" de Juana Pérez, progenitor de Jesús para abajo, o sea de tres de los cinco) están terminando de celebrar la Nochebuena en su humilde hogar (dos "cuartos", con una llave de agua pero sin WC, con piso de cemento irregular y harta ventilación). Ya comieron, muchísimo mejor que desde hace muchísimos meses, y Juana Pérez está de mejor humor que de costumbre, aunque tiene miedo de que el "esposo" todavía se podría presentar y arruinar este momento de paz familiar. El bebé y una niña ya están dormidos y los demás están hablando o jugando con algunas cosas que compraron, además de la comida, con la auténtica bonanza que trajeron Juan y Jesús a casa ayer. Había lloviznado varias veces durante el día y por fin tenían bastante trabajo lavando parabrisas. Con nueve horas de trabajo – muy cansado – ganaron, entre los dos, cuatrocientos setenta y dos pesos con cincuenta centavos y un dime gringo. Con eso se pagaron la comida navideña y los regalos, y queda para comprar algo de ropa que urge y más. No hay que confiar, bien saben. Cuando el negocio de los parabrisas podría ser mejor, en la temporada de lluvias, la competencia se pone feroz. Los chavos grandes, a veces en pandilla, agandallan casi todo. Juan va a tener que hacer maravillas con cuatro o cinco naranjas (algo que los que se drogan no pueden hacer) y Jesús tendrá que aprender. Hay tanto que aprender en esta vida.

Well, that was the Christmas story, and I'll conclude by linking its underlying moral to ELT: There are serious contradictions and urgent issues in our 21st century societies that are misunderstood, neglected or ignored. The story is written in the spirit of the Christmas stories of Dickens, so I'll make that link in both the moralistic and the pragmatic or common sense traditions of the 19th century, Dickens' century.

It's wrong to spend financial and human resources on universal ELT over 12 or more years of basic education when other human needs are crying out for more investment and attention, from the universal

and effective protection of children's rights to the planned and effective protection of the environment in which today's children and the generations of children after them will live.

It's nonsensical to spend financial and human resources on universal ELT over 12 or more years of basic education (instead of other things that are crying out for more investment and attention) in the face of clear evidence that a largely English-speaking adult population can neither be achieved that way nor is necessary in Latin America (or Spain, Portugal, France and other countries with a strong international language). Currently, after decades of 6+ years of ELT before higher education , and then more ELT in higher education, below 15% of the adult population in almost all Latin America have a functional command of English, and around 22% in Spain, 27% in Portugal and 39% in France. The fact is, while more people in those countries (perhaps 5-10% more) may need English, most don't and never will. That majority of people (60, 70, 80%...), as children and teenagers at school realize that and aren't motivated to learn English, and that's been reflected and continues to be reflected in the results of school ELT in Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Spain, Portugal, France and other countries. Those of them who find they do need English later in life will then be motivated to learn it and usually manage to do so in higher education, commercial or government language centres, as has been the case up to now.

Christmas-New Year has traditionally been a time for nostalgia, hope and resolutions for a better life. I'm sure you agree that our hopes, resolutions and concrete plans should be both as ethical and as realistic as possible, perhaps more than ever before at this time in human history. We all desperately need some 2020 foresight as well as lots of 2020 hindsight. What's gone wrong over the past years, decades, centuries? What's continuing to go wrong? What desperately needs correcting?

Many national ELT programmes? Well, they're among the least of our worries, but by improving ELT in our institution, our country and beyond we may improve the world just a little. Extending ELT

heedlessly, against all the evidence that it isn't working, won't. Hay mucho que aprender en esta vida. Sim, há muito o que aprender nessa vida.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Paul Davies retired in 2018 after 55 years in English Language Teaching, based mostly in Mexico. His main places of work were the Instituto Anglo Mexicano de Cultura (now The Anglo Mexican Foundation), The British Council Mexico, and several Mexican universities.

In the Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, in 1965 and 66, he taught in the Preparatoria Benito Juárez (High School) and the Departamento de Lenguas. In the Anglo, between 1967 and 1991, he was Branch Director, Director of Studies and Director of Operations.

In the British Council, between 1992 and 2012, he was an EFL teacher trainer and Senior ELT Consultant. In the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo, between 2013 and 2018, he was the team leader and main author of the Make It Real! ELT materials project. He also taught in public secondary school for 2 years, and did teacher training in that sector, organized by the British Council and the Mexican Secretaría de Educación Pública. In 1973 he was a Founder Member of MEXTESOL and its first Parliamentarian, and later President of the Puebla Chapter and National MEXTESOL President.

He co-authored EFL textbooks for Mexican public secondary schools published by Macmillan and by Oxford University Press. Apart from *Make It Real!*, his 21st century publications include *Success in English Language Teaching* (Oxford University Press, 2000), *Skyline and Sky High* (Macmillan, 2001 and 2006). He also had many ELT articles published, in *MEXTESOL Journal, ELT Journal, Modern*

English Teacher, English Teaching Professional, TESL-EJ, and *Revista Lengua y Cultura* (UAEH).

Between August 2018 and July 2020, he published, edited and wrote articles for the 24 monthly numbers of an open access online magazine, *English Language Teaching in Latin America*. This book contains these articles.