We asked five experts to discuss an aspect of methodology which they found important, whether reflecting on their career, training teachers, teaching classes or simply as an insight.

Methodology – a personal perspective

Christina Latham-Koenig

My teaching years covered a period in which methodologies moved from grammar translation to communicative via all kinds of different teaching ideas, some more wacky than others. Most of my colleagues had been trained by International House, and the PPP system – Presentation, Practice, Production (or Personalisation in some cases, both are now considered somewhat dated, but nonetheless used in a recent AI lesson planning tool) – was what had been ingrained in us, and what was reflected in many of the coursebooks of the time. The aim was usually to get the students to speak in English, and when we gave observed classes, one of the most frequent criticisms we would receive was 'too much TTT' (teacher talking time), as the idea was that it should be the students who did all the talking. Indeed, one of the (in my opinion) wackier systems in vogue for a while was the Silent Way, which encouraged us to teach through mime, or another practice which involved using Cuisenaire rods to elicit sentences. Had we followed these techniques to the letter, it would, of course, have meant students rarely having the opportunity to hear an L1 speaker using the language. Neither would it have allowed us to share experiences with our students, nor build any kind of rapport with them. Using students' mother tongue was also frowned upon, and the idea of translating anathema. Right from the start, I felt there was a tendency with methodology to 'throw out the baby with the bathwater', i.e. to ditch every element of what was considered 'old-fashioned' in order to embrace the new. I always thought that this was a mistake. Why not, on occasion, translate a word into students' L1 (assuming you knew it), rather than waste valuable minutes of class time by miming? I think teachers of my generation often applied a healthy dose of scepticism to many of the 'new' methodologies and used their common sense – we incorporated whatever aspects of the methodology we had previously used that we knew worked, while at the same time welcoming new ideas that we thought would promote learning. We were also very clear that techniques like never using the students' L1, or the teacher practically never speaking in class, might be effective (or even necessary) strategies in multilingual classes taking place in the UK or other English-speaking countries, but it made no sense in monolingual classes abroad.

When Clive Oxenden and I were writing the *English File* (Latham-Koenig *et al.*, 2025) series, we were very much writing for teachers in similar circumstances to our own, i.e. teaching quite large groups of monolingual students, in our case in Spain. Most of our students wanted to learn English to communicate, either for professional or academic purposes, or in order to travel. They generally wanted to be able to speak and understand, rather than to read and write, and this influenced our methodological approach. I would say that the innovations of the *English File* methodology were that firstly, successful speaking depended on a combination of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation – so pronunciation, rather than being dealt with as an extra, needed to be tightly integrated into the main lessons. Secondly, speaking needed to be a major part of what was done in the classroom in every stage of a lesson, for example, through reacting to reading and listening material or using speaking games to practise vocabulary. Above all, given that students were likely to be the same nationality, it was essential to have activities which motivated them to speak in English.

It is a fact that the world is changing, and this will continue to have an impact on methodology. With all the developments in technology, students' needs and wishes have changed – and methodology needs to reflect that. Many young people today, for example, use their phones to 'converse' in writing, so the importance of writing, including frequently using common abbreviations, has increased enormously. Technological advances also influence *how* students learn, for example, they can now use their phones to google information, exchange photos and messages, or make short films. Students themselves have also changed. They tend to have shorter attention spans and expect more visual (as opposed to simply aural) stimulation; as a result, video has become an integral part of teaching materials, assuming far greater importance than before, an aspect which we have responded to in our latest edition of *English File*. So methodology needs to adapt, and embrace possibilities that may not have previously been available. However, the changes in the way we guide our students and in the way they learn really just reflect changes in the way we communicate. The basic desires and needs of learners of

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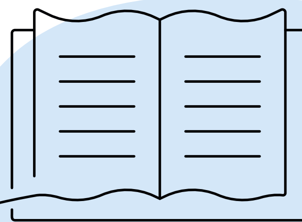

a foreign language, that is, to be able to communicate, and the role of the teacher in facilitating this, have not fundamentally changed. For that reason, I believe that some version of the communicative methodology will always be relevant.

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How has standard methodology developed over the last thirty years?

Rachel Appleby

I was 'brought up' in ELT in the early 90s on the PPP approach – **P**resent new language, provide **P**ractice and then promote **P**roduction. Having learnt French at school with an L1 French teacher who insisted on speaking English (not quite grammar translation), this was already a welcome novelty.

Throughout the 1990s, there seemed to be a flurry of new and exciting ideas like

ARC (Scrivener, 1994), whereby every lesson has a balance of activities: some **A** – authentic, some **R** – restricted practice (similar to the middle 'P' above) and some **C** – clarification (compare the first 'P' above).

Student–student communication seemed to take off more with **task based learning** (TBL), although still covertly including three Ps and ARC. Additionally, TBL gets students to do a pre-task, and only afterwards does the teacher draw out language the students need; they then have a second task or chance after language focus (Willis, 1996).

In passing, there was also **guided discovery**, which, if you like, adapts the first 'P' of PPP. It prompted a host of materials which involved students identifying patterns in sentences, and thereby 'discovering' rules. (Discovery learning had been prevalent in other fields some 30 years earlier.)

The **lexical approach** (Willis, 1996; also Lewis, 1990; Sinclair, 1991; Hoey, 1991) prioritised not just vocabulary, but 'chunks' – phrases – based on examples from authentic sources and corpus linguistics. I found this refreshingly exciting, yet I felt, at times, aspects of this were simply 'slotted into' traditional materials.

So by now, we've moved from a focus on grammar and explanations, to the communicative classroom and more focus on vocabulary and students' needs. From conference talks and in-house workshops, all this provided many of us with plenty of food for thought.

While **student-centred learning** had been familiar from decades earlier, the real focus on students' needs appeared to me as a minor revolution: now known as **'teaching unplugged'**, or **Dogme ELT**, this encourages teaching without preprepared materials; instead, the teacher draws on language from students' own contexts for deciding what to focus on (Thornbury & Meddings, 2000). Within this arose the idea of 'emergent language', the teacher understanding what the students need, rather than imposing 'the language of the next unit', prevalent in PPP. This also promoted far more genuine and authentic communication, and, in turn, motivation. Although exciting, it didn't exactly lend itself easily to teaching a weekly pre-intermediate group, where we were expected to 'cover the first six units'!

Furthering students' needs, the focus moved internationally: in a shake-up where standard British English no longer 'ruled', research into 'non-native speakers' (NNS) using English with each other pushed forward the idea of **English as a lingua franca** (ELF) (Jenkins, 2001). This 'globalised' – even promoted – an international English used by L2 users together in business, diplomacy and so on. ELF embraces intelligibility, and focuses far less on grammatical or lexical accuracy, positively shunning, for example, the need to correct that third person singular 's' if it doesn't lead to misunderstandings. And in business English, ELF soon became 'BELF' (Louhiala-Salminen, 2005) – very much a topical issue today.

Concurrently, there was also **Content and Language Integrated Learning** (CLIL): teaching biology to school students through English (Marsh, 1994); this became prevalent in the early 2000s, with the aim of promoting multilingualism. While it's still prevalent in many (quasi-) international schools, **English medium instruction** (EMI) (Dearden, 2015) (also English medium education [EME]) is now also extensive for supporting academic staff in higher education (HE) who are having to teach their subject in English due to droves of international students arriving to study in English (and bringing with them much-needed funding). In my direct experience, however, EMI training rather promotes effective **communicative language teaching** (CLT), with HE staff often lacking pedagogical training. CLIL and EMI are perhaps steps towards 'translanguaging', whereby the individual uses the languages they have at their disposal in order to communicate clearly and effectively.

More recently, language teaching has further reflected important global trends, including: diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI); teacher and student wellbeing; 21st century skills (critical thinking and digital literacy being especially evident in ELT); and the Sustainable Development

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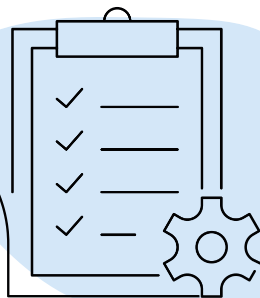

Goals (SDGs). While crucial considerations in any contemporary classroom, these shouldn't displace a valid approach to learning and sound methodology.

And right now, my own teaching (largely one-to-one online) cannot be categorised as any of the above. Instead of, earlier, struggling to produce a rigorous rule-based lesson plan, I now respond, usually on the hoof, to how my students are communicating; is this finally 'teaching unplugged'? I push them to excel in areas that matter most to them and strive to promote intelligibility. I have, as back-up, a range of activity types suitable for each one, always following my belief that language has to be needed, embedded in an authentic context and – ideally – fun, for it to be remembered and used effectively later. I'd call my method 'principled eclecticism'.

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PPP – outdated or fit for purpose?

John Hughes

Over the last thirty years, it's been one of the most criticised 'methodologies' in English language teaching. Articles, blogs and even entire books have been written with the aim of throwing it into the dustbin of language teaching history. And yet, it has outlived other approaches that have come and gone. PPP or 'Present-Practise-Produce' as a method or a way to approach lesson planning and teach language remains the great survivor of ELT.

Back in 1992 on my initial teacher training course, it was the standard approach. My trainer told me that I should choose an area of language, work out a way to present it, have my students practise it in a very controlled way, and then give them free practice at the end with the new language alongside the rest of what they knew. As a new and inexperienced teacher, PPP made total sense to me. It felt achievable and it felt safe.

Over the years that followed as a developing teacher, I quickly became aware of its shortfalls. It didn't work so well if the students already knew the language point you were going to teach. It felt problematic with skills-based lessons or advanced classes. With one-to-one teaching where you needed to respond to the learner's own language needs (what these days we might refer to as 'emergent language'), PPP was much too rigid. There were times when the PPP paradigm put a straitjacket on the lesson.

But despite all these well-trodden arguments against PPP, I still see it used today when observing teacher's lessons, or by trainers on training courses, and it often provides the backbone to a lesson in course materials. So what explains it's continued survival? As I reminisced earlier, for a new teacher it feels logical. You decide what you will teach, and you teach it. That's safer than, for example, going into a class with nothing planned in the hope you can build a lesson around what students may or may not say (aka Dogme).

PPP also provides a core to a lesson. Yes, you can add a lead-in to the lesson, have a quiz, go off on a tangent and talk about what students did at the weekend. But you also know that you can return to your basic set of PPP exercises when needed. Perhaps also, from a student's point of view, a PPP lesson means they leave the classroom able to state what they 'learnt'. It won't always be the language they needed, and it may not be the language item that naturally reflects their order of language acquisition, but nonetheless, it's tangible and – for those students who desire assessment – it's measurable.

Like you, I have days when PPP seems redundant and outdated, but I also have days when it seems to work. It hits the mark. It gives students (especially at beginner and elementary levels) a strong sense of satisfaction. So maybe – thirty years on from my first attempts at teaching with PPP – it still has value. Like I say, I still see it everywhere in ELT.

Investigating classroom practice to understand our methodology

Richard Chinn

Over the last 30 years there has been a proliferation of scholarly work regarding ELT methodology. This is not surprising, as in this period there has been a greater drive for professionalism and gaining a deeper understanding of what language teaching and learning entails. Richards defines methodology as consisting of the 'approach or philosophy, role of the teacher,

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role of the learners, learning activities and tasks, [and] instructional materials' (Richards, 1990:20). A teacher's approach to instruction is influenced by their beliefs about how learning takes place and which teaching methods are appropriate, whether those beliefs are consciously recognised or not. This approach is not fixed; it develops through flexible, imaginative and exploratory processes that begin again each time the teacher works with a new group of students. Bell (2007) found that teachers tend to take a practical approach to methodology, selecting techniques that suit the particular demands of their teaching context. Instead oғ adhering rigidly to a single method, they often draw on a variety of strategies to respond to the needs of their learners and environment. Through this process, teachers form their own personal theories of practice, which may be either consciously articulated or remain tacit.

In recent years, there has been a move to explore teachers' underlying beliefs which influence their practice, and this has led to a more nuanced view of classroom interaction and learning. One such view is that to understand the methodology that teachers use in class, teachers should be encouraged to investigate their own practice. Mann and Walsh (2017) have suggested 'dialogic reflection' to do this, where teachers are encouraged to collect data from their classes and use this to stimulate reflection on what underpins the choices we make in class and to help understand how certain situations unfold.

This approach is grounded in a sociocultural perspective on learning, which highlights the importance of understanding how contextual factors shape teachers' beliefs and principles. These factors influence what language is learnt, how it is learnt, and the professional development that arises through the act of teaching. In dialogic reflection, teachers can reflect using an artefact such as a video of a lesson or collaborate with colleagues to examine classroom practice. For instance, they might share a short video clip of a lesson and discuss aspects of interaction, such as the types of questions used. These could include display questions, which are closed and elicit known answers, or referential questions, which invite genuine and meaningful responses. The video serves as a stimulus for reflection, offering an accurate account of what occurred in the lesson. Alternatively, teachers may explore their methods by collecting feedback from learners on areas such as correction techniques or the treatment of emergent language. Gaining insight into learners' perspectives can help teachers assess whether certain practices are principled or merely ritualistic. It can also shed light on effective strategies, encouraging thoughtful consideration of why particular approaches may represent good practice.

A personal example of this occurred some time ago when I reviewed classroom data from my own teaching and noticed frequent use of explicit feedback in response to emergent language. This observation led me to reflect on the underlying reasons for this practice, as it revealed a tacit belief that drawing explicit attention to language forms was beneficial for learners. I hypothesised that this was because learners need to see and hear the form of the language in question, and that writing it on the board could enhance opportunities for noticing. Further investigation revealed that this was supported by principles, such as those in sociocultural theory, that encourage use of explicit feedback, particularly when combined with scaffolding, as it's believed to facilitate and accelerate the learning process.

As previously mentioned, teachers rarely subscribe to a single method or approach. However, this inquiry-based perspective on teaching allows for fine-grained, 'microscopic understandings' of classroom practice (Walsh, 2011:51), which ultimately provides teachers with a more informed and articulated view of their actual approach to teaching and learning (van Lier, 2000). In this vein, a teacher's methodological approach can be seen as personal and eclectic, yet principled. In my opinion this is a 'good' methodology.

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A few thoughts on storytelling as an approach to professional development

Alan Maley and Dr Chang Liu

What happens when a master storyteller turns his attention to teacher development? In this interview, Professor Alan Maley, well-known author and educator in English language teaching, speaks with **Dr Chang Liu** about Alan's latest book, *Using Wisdom Stories in Language Teacher Education* (Pavilion Publishing). Their dialogue explores how narrative can function not only as a pedagogical resource but also as a powerful tool for personal and professional growth. The interview is available online at https://vimeo.com/1133826708/0981108bdf?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci

The book, as Alan shares, was not born from a single moment of inspiration but

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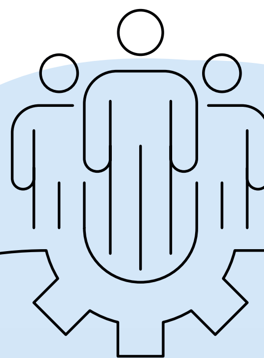

emerged over two decades of collecting, telling and pondering wisdom stories.

> 'I have been collecting wisdom stories for over 20 years,' he reflects, 'and gradually it dawned on me that they were an engaging way to initiate discussions on all kinds of issues related to teaching.'

These stories, ranging from Sufi parables to contemporary anecdotes, are open-ended, encouraging interpretation and deeper reflection rather than offering direct lessons.

Rather than delivering ready-made answers, the stories prompt teachers to engage in critical thinking, self-inquiry, and meaningful dialogue. 'The aim,' Alan says, 'is not to teach, but to provoke reflection that leads to growth.' For him, CPD is as much about personal vitality as professional expertise: it is about 'staying alive mentally, and in other ways, as a teacher and as a person'.

A highlight of the interview is Alan's practical yet elegant 8Rs framework: Read, Reflect, Relate, Respond, Recommend, Reinforce, Research, Record – designed to guide educators in using stories thoughtfully. This structure helps teachers move beyond passive consumption to active engagement, enabling them to connect the stories to their own lives and teaching contexts.

The conversation also touches on the human core of teaching: empathy, care and connection. Quoting Theodore Roosevelt's 'they don't care how much you know until they know how much you care', Alan emphasises that what students often remember is not content, but how a teacher made them feel. 'Teachers are remembered for their personal qualities, for caring, for listening, for respecting different views.'

The value of ambiguity and metaphor in these stories is also explored. Many are intentionally paradoxical, encouraging diverse interpretations and deeper understanding. Alan notes, 'You can't teach empathy directly… but you can create space for it by offering opportunities to think and talk.' One memorable example he shares is a story about a young archer who shoots arrows at a blank wall and then paints targets around them. It is a playful metaphor that invites reflection on lesson planning, goal setting and adaptability.

In addition to wisdom stories, the book draws from other text types: 1) poems, for their emotional resonance and ambiguity; 2) quotations, for their conciseness and power to spark discussion; 3) metaphors, which offer new perspectives on familiar ideas; 4) teacher anecdotes, grounding abstract ideas in classroom reality; and 5) book recommendations, pointing educators toward deeper inquiry.

Rather than offering a fixed curriculum, the book is conceived as a flexible toolkit, something to be dipped into, adapted and shared. 'It is supposed to be used loosely … to ignite reflection and conversation,' Alan explains.

Looking ahead, he hopes the book finds its way into the hands of teacher educators and mentors, becoming 'one of the tools in the toolbox', a resource that ripples outward through communities of practice. He is modest about its commercial ambitions but committed to its educational potential: to inspire reflection, connection and renewed passion for teaching.

For those new to using stories in CPD, his advice is simple and warm: 'Start collecting stories, build your own bank and learn to tell them well.' More than a method, storytelling is, for Maley, a means of humanising education, providing teachers with not just tools but insights into themselves.

This interview invites us to reconsider CPD not merely as training, but as transformation. Whether you are new to teaching or decades into your career, Alan's reflections will leave you inspired to listen more deeply, question more gently and teach more fully, from the head, the hands and, above all, the heart.

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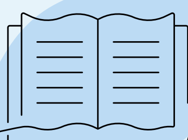

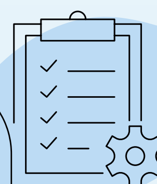

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