

Global Voices

Teaching stories from around the world

In this issue we have included teachers who write for us, review materials for us, are regular readers and potential contributors. Will your story be next?

Clare, UK



■■■ Thirty six years ago, in the Terrace Room at Bell Cambridge, I was a fresh modern languages graduate doing my CELTA (then, the RSA Certificate in TEFLA). Now, I'm the longest-serving teacher and, in October 2024, I'll have been working here for 30 years. Who'd've thought it?!

Back in 1987, I grappled with new terminology: to elicit (not illicit) vocabulary, drilling, infinitive and gerund forms, activating schemata (fallen out of favour, along with Multiple Intelligences Theory), gist versus detail, cloze versus gapfill. Nowadays, I absolutely relish teaching language features: clefting, fronting, inversion, dangling participles, reduced relatives, the Oxford comma – bring 'em on. I teach all levels, from beginner to proficiency, one-to-one courses, Cambridge exam and IELTS preparation, and run a lot of specialist teacher training courses: Contemporary English, British Culture, Language and Methodology, English for Healthcare Professionals, English for German Lecturers to name a few.

I've been a regular contributor to *MET* for many years, reviewing coursebooks and other publications. It's work like this that allows me to keep abreast of industry preoccupations: the timely and welcome inclusion in coursebooks of other Englishes and accent diversity (I myself am a speaker of standard Scottish English), critical thinking skills, self-regulated learning, adaptive teaching (differentiation, once upon a time) and metacognition. What I like about *MET* as a publication is the voice it gives to teachers from all corners of the globe, whether you are a novice or an old hand. There's a good balance of background theory and practical ideas. I often use back copies of the mag in teacher training: participants choose an article to read and present to the whole group, saying what they learnt about current thinking, or what practical classroom activities they can take away and implement.

I'm often most inspired by articles written in *MET* about language: this month there's something fascinating about portmanteau words, and I think it'll galvanise me into re-writing some of my PowerPoints about blends and other methods of lexical coinage.

I'm happy to play a small ongoing role in the life of *MET*. Long may the magazine continue! ■■■

Gerhard, Taiwan

■■■ While the bulk of my duties still involve the running of my school called Inspired Kids, and my training organisation, called Inspired CPD, I have ventured into more outreach projects over the last few months. Locally, we are working with an orphanage where we deliver English and chess classes, we do fundraising events for orphanages in our area, as well as a recent one for the Hands Up project, and a meal voucher scheme for less fortunate families. We also did a teaching project with Rotary International through an outreach event for students in remote areas in the South of Taiwan. Obviously, some of these efforts are more successful than others, but, overall, I feel it is important to give back to the community, as it is very closely tied with both our organisation's mission and vision statements.

I am hoping to expand what we are doing from an outreach point of view, and we are currently in negotiations with two organisations to provide teacher training and support to children in the Middle East, especially refugees and displaced children. I will hopefully be blogging about this in the coming year, and I will be talking about this at the YLTSIG Web Conference in January.

Other than teaching and training, and of course writing, I still



do a little bit of magic and play chess with my kids. My oldest is very close to beating me consistently and he has recently won his first chess competition. My middle and youngest children love music and dancing and were recently in a show where they showcased their talents. I am quite proud of them, because they seem to be very good at all the things I was good at as a teenager, except, they're probably better than me. ■■■

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Iuliia, Italy

■■■ Growing up in the post-Soviet space, little did I know that a childhood dream of becoming a teacher could turn into an exciting life-long journey that would get me to meet and collaborate with people from all over the world and in different countries. I have worked in the role of a teacher and academic and project manager in Russia, teacher trainee in Spain and England, a Fulbright teaching assistant in the USA, and I am currently a primary and secondary teacher at the British Council in Rome, Italy. Each role has been a kaleidoscope of learning, which broadened my toolkit as a teacher and instilled in me adaptability, flexibility and curiosity – the qualities that became my compass in the ever-evolving field of education.



Over the years, the focus of my professional interests has changed in response to the teaching environment I found myself in and the challenges it presented. While working towards the DipTESOL qualification, I was very much into learning about phonology, its importance for language learning and implications for teaching, and I was a huge fan of Krashen's theory of second language acquisition. There used to be a popular joke in my household about me 'having a crush' on Stephen Krashen.

The 2020 pandemic brought about the urgent need to move our teaching online and with that to develop the digital skills required for survival. At the time, I was teaching primary learners aged five to seven, and my main concern was how to support their social and emotional learning within the digital realm. That made me reflect on my teaching and identify the activities that could be transferred or adapted to be used online with as much success as they would in face-to-face teaching. Luckily, there were plenty that promoted self- and social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management and building relationship skills. And it turned out that storytelling, mindfulness and creativity play a huge role in all that, too – so that's where my professional development focus went.

Since we have come back into the classroom, my focus shifted again and this time towards adapting photocopiable materials to be used without printing or copying. That might seem illogical because they are called 'photocopiables' for a reason, but if we pay more attention to how many handouts end up either in a rubbish bin or a scrap paper drawer, making an effort to develop a 'greener' approach actually makes sense. And although it might require more creativity at the start, it takes next to nothing to become a teacher's second nature.

What next? AI is bringing a lot of exciting opportunities for both learning and teaching, so I am looking into that at the moment.

■■■

Anna, Dubai

■■■ What I do? Well, it seems such a simple question but the answer is challenging as I'm involved in many things. In a nutshell, I'm a freelance teacher educator. In this role I take on many different jobs and, to be honest, that freedom to be involved in a wide variety of projects is what I absolutely love about my job! I've been in the ELT industry for 23 years as a teacher, director of studies, education consultant, teacher educator and CAE assessor.



I'm currently in Dubai, but working on different projects brings me all over the region, and beyond. One day I might be assessing a course for Cambridge, the next delivering training for primary school teachers on teaching with social emotional competences or I might be at home writing blog posts on exam skills.

The majority of my time is spent on teacher training, such as CELTA, and writing and delivering teacher development modules, such as DELTA, and other bespoke course deliveries for ministries and other organisations. Besides writing regularly and being a resident blogger for *MET*, I really value my own development and started a doctorate, focusing on educational psychology and professional learning. I'm super passionate about anything related to making better learning happen, not only for students but also for teachers and teacher educators! Another big project on the go is a book for ELT teachers on social emotional learning, as I'm not busy enough clearly, so keep your eye out for it in 2024.

After all these years, I still love ELT. I'm very much aware that I'm privileged to be able to do what I love and am extremely grateful for all the opportunities I have had so far. Being in ELT is not a job, it has become my lifestyle which immerses me in a rich world of different cultures and perspectives. Everyday I learn something new from those I meet and work with and I'm proud that many of us in ELT strive to promote a culture of acceptance and sharing. What inspires me the most is empowering fellow educators to further grow and achieve their dreams. In other words, I strive to make a difference, however small that might be. ■■■

Huma Hasna Riaz Ahmed, United Arab Emirates

■■■ The day you think, you have got a lesson 'exactly right', there might be a problem. If that day comes, do things differently, experiment, innovate and keep on learning.

I live by this mantra.

My name is Huma Hasna Riaz Ahmed, and I come from India. While I don't particularly subscribe to the hierarchy of languages, I can say that English is my fourth language. I have been teaching English for over 14 years at the British Council. During this time, I have worn many hats: teacher, trainer, materials writer, examiner and e-moderator. My teaching journey has taken me from classrooms in India to those in England – and now I find myself in the UAE where I usually teach adult learners.

What keeps me going? What fuels my passion for teaching? It's my never-ending journey as a learner. I have been a student all my teaching life. From chalkboards to smart boards, and now with the integration of AI, I have welcomed change with open arms to adapt to the ever-changing educational landscape.

An integral part of my journey is action research. I enjoy the process of reflection and research, battling the challenges that classrooms present. My first foray into action research was during the DipTESOL course a few years ago, where I explored the factors influencing adult learner motivation when studying online courses. This was back in 2017, a time when online teaching wasn't as widespread as it is today. Since then, I have continued to research and experiment with various intervention strategies.

One such strategy that holds an important place in my lesson planning is self-assessment. My research has shown that self-assessment is a practical and effective method to bridge

the gap between autonomy and motivation, fostering reflection and ownership. Self-assessment and reflection are now integral to my teaching.

And then, I stumbled upon Demand High 3XP. According to this approach, the same practice activity is repeated multiple times in different ways, rapidly, within the same lesson. My research revealed that this method boosts the confidence of lower-level learners, as feedback from teachers and peers after each repetition enhances performance. So, now, 3XP and my lessons for lower-level learners go hand in hand, with great success.

What's next?

At the moment, I have taken on the challenge of re-evaluating the English-only policy in my classroom. I am studying the impact of multilingual teaching on lower-level learners' confidence in using language. This research is ongoing, and it's the first time I've felt such anxiety about my research. Challenging the general narrative that society has accepted for ages isn't easy. But isn't that the very essence of classroom research? – to step out of your comfort zone, engage in internal battles and keep pushing forward? ■■■



Damien, Thailand

■■■ I've been in the teaching game for close to twenty-five years now. I've worn many hats over this time: first as a teacher, then as a programme coordinator, and now as the director of studies at my school in Thailand.

And, of course, we can't forget about my vlogging job for *MET!*

I am in a one-of-a-kind situation where I can run my school remotely in Australia.

How did I get to this point?

Well, to tell a long story short, I met my wife in Melbourne Australia. A few years later an opportunity came up to return to her hometown in Trat, Thailand and open a language school.

In my naivety, I imagined that a large portion of my time would be dedicated to island hopping and admiring the sunset. It wasn't.

Funnily enough, building a school from scratch doesn't leave you much time for anything else. But the school we built together, Trat English Community (TEC), is a special place. We have a real emphasis on a love of reading and developing that love in our students. In my past teaching contexts, I'd only get a quick snapshot of my students' English journeys – teaching a class for a period of ten to twenty weeks only. At TEC, I've been with our students across their whole English journey. They were just four-year-olds when I first saw them arrive at the school, brimming with excitement and little English. Now, they've transformed into confident teenage speakers of English,

ready to take on the world. That's something pretty special.

This year, my thoughts have been consistently drawn to artificial intelligence and its potential implications for the teaching community. It's hard for me to not get caught up in another tech hype cycle, although tools such as ChatGPT constantly impress and unsettle me.

A major advantage of this tool is its remarkable speed in analysing essays and providing in-depth feedback within seconds. From a pessimistic standpoint, I think the internet is going to become a poorer place, a more inauthentic place with a deluge of substandard AI-generated content.

It's going to be harder to tell what's real and what's not in teaching, with broader implications for society too. ■■■

