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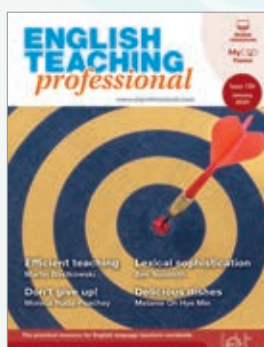
Looking after your wellbeing



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This collection contains articles, chapters, and units from *English Teaching professional* and *Modern English Teacher*



Hey! How are you? Teacher wellbeing in the New Year

Michelle Ocricano, English Teaching professional blog, 08 January 2020

It is true that being a teacher is incredibly rewarding. There are few occupations that allow professionals to see the beauty of human development. However, it is also true that the job can be difficult, challenging and emotionally draining.



It is about this less discussed side of teaching that I want to talk about today. It is January and many of us are planning the New Year, whereas others are having a winter break and starting the second half of the school year. Either way, this time is when we usually look back and remember John Lennon's lyrics *'So this is Christmas, and what have you done?'* ...

I had a chat with some friends who are also teachers and when I talked about the question in the song, the answer was *'nothing, I just worked'*. I promptly disagreed and reminded them that we don't just 'work'. In the simplest of the days, we touch and change so many lives, we teach language and culture, we act as counselors, we show we care, we look after students' wellbeing ... and well, that list soon becomes too long for a blog post! Teaching is no easy task and the number of professionals leaving the field has been making headlines for quite some time. Whereas teaching in general is among the most stressful jobs in the world, Golombek & Doran (2014) say that teaching language is a particularly emotionally demanding subject because of the strong focus on interpersonal relations and the integration of personally meaningful content and identities.

So, I'd like to propose a different question instead of the usual *'What have you done?'* Let's try *'How are you?'*. Take a moment and reflect back about how you have been looking after yourself. If you are not sure how to do it, then read on because I have some suggestions to help you improve your wellbeing.



Mindfulness

Mindfulness has become increasingly popular over the years. It can be defined in many ways including the ability to be fully present in the moment. Mindfulness has proven benefits that go from decreased stress and sadness to increased levels of focus and happiness.

To understand more about Mindfulness and how you can apply it to your life and classroom, read the *English Teaching professional* article *Beating stress: mindfulness in the classroom and Not only, but also: mindfulness* – recent blog posts by Chia Suan Chong.



STOPP – in the name of wellbeing

It is true that it is very difficult to stop negative feelings and thoughts, but you can certainly learn to deal with them. In the words of Professor Jon Kabat-Zinn 'You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.' It was Professor Jon Kabat-Zinn who created my last tip: the **STOPP** acronym.

S: Stop

- Just pause for a moment.

T: Take a Breath

- Notice your breathing as you breathe in and out.

O: Observe

- What thoughts are going through your mind right now?
- Where is your focus of attention?
- What are you reacting to?
- What sensations do you notice in your body?

P: Pull Back – Put in Some Perspective

- What's the bigger picture?
- What is another way of looking at this situation?
- What would a trusted friend say to me right now?
- Is this thought a fact or an opinion?
- What is a more reasonable explanation?
- How important is this? How important will it be in 6 months' time?

P: Practice What Works – Proceed

- What is the best thing to do right now? For me? For others? For the situation?
- What can I do that fits with my values?
- Do what will be effective and appropriate (Vivyan, 2015).



Look at the bright side

We often tend to focus on the negative aspects of life. Although this is normal behaviour, it is certainly not very helpful. So when you start feeling that everything is gloomy, try one small and positive activity every day such as:

- having a real good cup of coffee with a friend;
- binge-watching your favorite series;
- packing your favorite lunch in a nice container;
- going for a walk a focus on your breathing;
- putting on your headphones and listen to your favorite tunes;
- baking something for yourself and for other teachers;
- preparing your meals the night before so you can enjoy a couple more minutes in bed.

My intention with this post was definitely not to reinvent the wheel, but just to remind you of the little things you can do to improve your wellbeing. I hope you know how great and important you are. I also hope you really will look after yourself in the New Year.

Let's help other teachers with suggestions to improve our wellbeing. Please share your thoughts, ideas and success stories with us in the comments.

Off the mat and into the classroom

Laura Hadwin reflects on the transferability of yoga to English teaching.

A person's physical, emotional and mental well-being, whether they are a teacher or learner, is very important, and a dedicated yoga practice supports and strengthens these. Recently, there has been greater emphasis on the importance of self-care, as well as affective factors in teaching and learning. Yoga translates to 'union', and it could also help us unite our personal and professional lives, as well as strengthen our connections with people, and also ideas. Yoga prepares us for life off of the mat, and English classrooms prepare our learners for employment, immigration or other opportunities. I do not think it is a coincidence that many of my English teacher colleagues and friends are also yoga teachers, and that many other English teachers love yoga! Observing another teacher, regardless of their area, is always useful, and I see many aspects of yoga that could be applied in our English language classrooms. I have selected 12 transferable lessons learned from yoga, and reflected on how these have positively impacted my teaching.

Pace

Teaching can be an incredibly stressful job, and going to yoga before or after class can be a great way to relieve stress and increase endorphins. There are times that I am really frustrated, but after a yoga class emerge with a completely changed mindset. Additionally, our workloads seem to be increasing, and when facing a daunting stack of essays, as well as a week's worth of lessons to plan, teachers forget about or feel forced to sacrifice their physical health. Furthermore, as a result of our technology-dominated world, we seem to be moving far less, but

by attending a yoga class, particularly a more dynamic class, we can address this, and it feels great to change the pace and be physically invigorated. Our yoga teachers also remind us that it is essential to truly experience a pose, rather than rush through it, and also to make space to savour life. This led me to reflect on my teaching, and rather than trying to plan

“In many yoga classes I have been to, there is an appreciation for approaching our practice from a beginner’s mind, one that is fresh and open, and that has not become stagnant or fixed ...”

ahead while the learners are doing a task, I make time to just observe them, and have improved my teaching by reflecting on their development. I have also tried to exploit and maximise opportunities for learning as they arise, rather than trying to strictly adhere to my lesson plan, or

fit in more activities. Additionally, we often 'fly with the fastest', which means we respond to the quickest and most vocal learners, and to counter this I have made a conscious effort to incorporate activities that involve thinking time before responses are accepted. Additionally, because learners rush to finish their work, and this compromises the quality, I also often return it several times, and this encourages deeper engagement and attention to detail. This deliberate action is echoed in yoga when our teachers remind us to enter, hold and exit poses with focus and intention.

Focus for flow

Yoga increases mental clarity and focus, which are essential for teaching, but these also seem to be decreasing in our fast-paced digital world. The attention span of a goldfish, which is nine seconds, has now apparently surpassed a human's, which has decreased from twelve to eight seconds. The yoga studio is a place to free ourselves from technological distraction, and being fully present in a class later helps us feel more physically and mentally invigorated. However, staying entirely present is difficult, and despite my best intentions, I am often blessed with unrelated English teaching ideas! This is an example of diffusion, where rather than staying in our office and focusing on our work (and often struggling for inspiration), doing a different activity gives our brains the opportunity to change focus, and this results in increased creativity and productivity. Moreover, after a yoga class, I can enter into a state of flow much more easily, meaning I can become completely absorbed in my work, and as a result



am much more efficient, not to mention clear-minded and calm. I incorporate collaborative project-based work where learners design posters and present on a new app, restaurant or municipal initiative, and immersive tasks like these really allow them to get into an English learning flow!

Beginner's mind

Taking a yoga class, particularly for those English teachers who have never done it, helps develop empathy for our learners, particularly beginners or those recently returning to learning. We personally experience what it is like to learn something new, and when we critically reflect on this process, as well as our emotions, we become more empathetic. In many yoga classes

I have been to, there is an appreciation for approaching our practice from a beginner's mind, one that is fresh and open, and that has not become stagnant or fixed, and I find this useful to remember when planning lessons, designing materials or teaching. Additionally, my yoga teachers have always encouraged us to use supports such as bolsters, blocks or straps to enhance our practice, and rather than indicating inability or a less advanced practice, they show wisdom through a deeper evaluation of how we could support ourselves. Similarly, we can scaffold learning by allowing subtitles or dictionaries. We could also allow short cheatsheets as these build on existing knowledge and allow for a transfer of learning. As teachers, we can also turn to our colleagues for advice and information without feeling inadequate.

Ease, effort and exertion

English teachers are similar to yoga teachers in that we are often helping people who lack confidence about their abilities, and it is part of our job to encourage and support them. It is also important to help them identify and maintain a balance between ease, effort and exertion. This is an area that yoga teachers emphasise as it is essential for developing sustainable growth, particularly in a physical activity to prevent injuries, but also mentally and emotionally to prevent frustration and disengagement. My yoga teachers always remind us of several key points: as long as we do the best with where we are at that day, then that is enough; it is not helpful to always compare ourselves to others, and we could instead identify and celebrate our unique strengths and



gifts; and judging ourselves so harshly is counter-productive, in particular when we fall out of a pose. I see similar attitudes in my learners, and have incorporated these teachings in my English classes to help them grow in and out of the classroom. I ask them to evaluate their effort, rather than only their performance, and also to focus on what they would like to achieve in the future. This is a key area of my classroom focus on building meta-cognitive skills to strengthen and support affective factors in learning. Additionally, there are generally diverse abilities within classes, and one person's ease is another's exertion, and I often marvel at how some of my yoga teachers differentiate for learning, and this inspires me to consider how I could apply this more widely and effectively in my teaching.

Showing up

Additionally, my yoga teachers also often remind us that just coming to class is sometimes the most difficult aspect, and this is true for teachers as well! It is particularly relevant for language learners who struggle with motivation, as well as the responsibility of living on their own and often in a new country for the first time; however, it is also crucial to recognise that there is sometimes a fine line between supporting our learners when they struggle, and accepting a lack of effort, and this is where structured goal-setting with weekly check-ins can identify whether this was just a difficult week, or is a pattern. This process of checking in on how we feel physically, emotionally

and mentally is central in yoga, and is done in a non-judgemental manner. I think it would serve our learners well if they were encouraged to notice these factors, and identify how emotions, screen time, rest, diet, workload, and exercise affect learning. This would also help them develop greater emotional literacy, which would also help them outside of the classroom.

Strong foundations

Learning a language involves a mental workout, and it is essential to develop basic skills. Although some of this may not seem exciting, it is essential to create a strong foundation through practice. I find stories useful to inspire my learners, and I draw parallels to other areas of life, and this is where the yoga analogies often come in. For example, doing basic strength building exercises in yoga such as push ups or planks support stronger poses such as handstands, and similarly, stronger grammar and vocabulary allow for deeper and more nuanced communication. It is therefore key to emphasise that success is not generally the result of innate talent, but practice and perseverance.

Rewards of risks

I also highlight that learning anything involves risk and failure, and even attempting something new is a success in itself! This is also particularly true for trainee teachers, or for teachers who take a risk when being observed. I find it helpful to share humorous anecdotes

about some of my less than glorious teaching moments, and I was very moved and inspired when one of my yoga teachers shared her story about her initial fears of teaching, the mistakes she made, and how these helped her grow. Rather than revealing a weakness, this vulnerability allows us to become closer and find comfort in our shared struggles. Learning a new yoga pose is similar to learning how to teach something new, and as both involve risk and the mastering of different interconnected components, success is generally only possible after several 'failures', but these really present many, often hidden, opportunities for reflection and growth. They tell us about ourselves, showing us whether we are attracted to or avoid new challenges, as well as whether we respond or react in challenging situations.

Change

It is often said that change is the only constant in life, and our world seems to be changing very quickly, which many people find incredibly stressful. However, for our learners, adaptability is a key skill for 21st-century life, and I am inspired by how my yoga teachers encourage us to leave our comfort zones to face and embrace change. They suggest using our less dominant side in poses, closing our eyes for a few seconds, or trying different variations in postures. If they did not suggest it, I would continue entrenching myself in my comfortable habits and routines, but this will not serve me off the mat. I consciously use activities that feature change in my classes, and Monday is always 'New tables and new friends', and although there is often some initial resistance, they generally look forward to it after they are more familiar with it. This is particularly true for our teaching, and we should experiment with new activities, methods and approaches to continue to grow and stay motivated and inspired.

Sequencing

As a yoga student, I have often admired the sequencing of a series of postures, and thought about how I could incorporate a similar seamlessness in my class. This has

led me to reflect on my use of warmers and wrap-up activities, as well as the important interplay between stirrers/energisers and settlers/quieting activities. In the same way that the initial postures prepare us for the more advanced, warmers activate our awareness and strengthen our associations with the topic, making us better able to engage with it. There are important breaks between yoga poses, and these optimise efficiency by balancing effort and ease. I strongly advocate for sufficient breaks, where I encourage everyone to get up, socialise with friends at the college versus those on social media, move around, or leave the class and go outside for fresh air. When the teacher explains why this is beneficial for learning, it is better received, and I have noticed that when my yoga teachers do this, people are much more reluctant to try and sneak out of the studio before final savasana (resting pose).

Mindfulness and the breath

I have also tried to incorporate mindfulness, and although this was popular in the 1970s, I believe it truly has a place in our contemporary classrooms. I have used mindful breathing to start or centre a class, and this is how yoga classes begin. With the huge increases in anxiety being reported, it would be helpful to incorporate more of this into our classes, especially as it takes so

little time, and learners could also be encouraged to apply it outside of class. I have also used creative visualisation activities, including 'the Path', where learners visualise a journey through a forest, in which they encounter many objects, and each of these has a symbolic interpretation. After, they discuss this in small groups, and it has led to great discussions, while developing both reflective and higher order thinking skills including analysing and evaluating. I have received positive feedback, despite my initial concerns that they might not respond well.

Community

Community is a large part of yoga: we practise together in solidarity, and are encouraged to welcome all members. It is also much more motivating for many people to practise in community, rather than independently. I believe this is similar to the communities of learning that we create in our classrooms, and for teachers, professionally in regional and international teaching organisations. The relationships our learners make in our classes often last a lifetime, and it is crucial to make space for these to develop, and I encourage socialisation outside of class to not only develop language, but to learn more about this amazing and beautiful world we inhabit. For English teachers, international living means it can be difficult to find and

create community, but I have always found yoga studios welcoming places. Karma yoga, where donations are given to charity, is featured at many yoga studios. English language teaching has so much potential to include social justice because of flexibility with content, as well as the diversity of our learners, and I see a shift towards this, rather than the traditional 'Triple F' (Food, Fashion and Festivals). I share stories about how my commitment to volunteering enriches my life, and I also use problem-based learning, where in groups learners identify a social issue and create a charity to address it.

Gratitude

It is liberating, and challenging, to live more with the heart and body, as opposed to the head, and I have begun to incorporate gratitude into my classes. It is important to recognise how fortunate many of us are to live in safe countries with access to shelter and food, but I realise this has not always been the case for many of my learners, and is indeed probably not for some readers of this article, and it is important to recognise this as well. When my life has been challenging, I am always very grateful for my work, volunteering and yoga. I encourage all of us to actively appreciate our lives, to contribute to making the world a better place, to celebrate growth in our teaching and learning and to go to a yoga class! Operationalising these ideas can be difficult, and at times they may seem paradoxical, but intentionality, practice, reflection and enjoying the journey are more important!



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Exercise as a form of professional support

Daniel Xerri describes the need to encourage teachers to keep both physically and mentally fit.

I published my first refereed article in 2011, two years after enrolling on a doctoral programme in education at a university in the UK. After that initial article, my appetite for research and writing related to my professional life as a language teacher increased exponentially. The excitement of publishing articles, chapters and books about the issues that interest me has sustained the writing momentum for the past eight years. However, at one point, I realised that my sedentary lifestyle coupled with the stress of my teaching job were leading to a cost in terms of my physical and mental well-being. I can clearly remember the day when it dawned on me that the years spent sitting at my computer had not only led me to earn a PhD, produce a significant number of publications, and develop my academic knowledge about teaching and learning.

I had just gotten into the car I had rented in order to drive to my graduation ceremony when I felt I had become an unhealthy person. The size 34 jeans I had worn since I was a teenager no longer fit me and despite it being a bright sunny morning I was feeling exhausted and unhappy. A couple of weeks before, my doctor had warned me that my blood pressure was too high for a man my age and advised me to do something about it. The trip was meant to be a celebration of my scholarly achievement; however, I felt irritable and moody. This was something I had been experiencing for some time and it was having a knock-on effect on my personal relationships. Despite admitting to myself that I was the one at fault, I

lacked the willpower to refrain from picking arguments and being difficult as a person. I suspected that chaining myself to my desk after a day in the classroom and seeking fulfilment only in doing my academic work were the main reasons for my general sense of unwholesomeness. I realised that I had to make some changes to my lifestyle or else things were bound to get worse. Nonetheless, it took me a

“Ensuring that teachers have quality means to develop as professionals is essential, but so is enabling them to look after their physical and mental health.”

few more months before I found the will to go to a gym and step onto a treadmill. I opted for this machine because in my early teens I used to enjoy participating in athletics competitions at school. Now, as a man approaching middle age, I longed to rediscover the joy I used to experience whenever I ran in my youth.

Taking up running again was not easy. Initially, I made the common mistake of doing too much mileage, too fast, too soon. For the first few months, I was struck by a number of injuries and I always felt worn out after running for an hour or so. After doing some research about how to pace oneself and maximise the benefits of running, my body started to adjust to regular exercise and my stamina increased gradually. The benefits were almost immediate. Not only was I losing weight and feeling much healthier, but my sense of despondency seemed to fade away and I was better able to cope with the stress of my job. After about six months of weekly exercise, my physician ran some tests and confirmed that physically I was as right as rain. What mattered even more was that I felt happier. It was as if my life had become well-balanced.

Now that I have been doing it at least thrice weekly for more than a year, running is something I crave. So much so that when I have to miss out on a session because of a niggling pain or a bout of flu, I feel somewhat downcast. Running is something I look forward to and I always make sure to make time for it no matter how busy my week is. It not only enables me to stay in shape and cope with work- and life-related pressures, but it also helps me to be at one with myself and reflect on the things that matter to me. Running has become an important means by which I take stock of my life and push myself forward. Perhaps this is partly why Alan Sillitoe (1959: 19) says that ‘the long-distance run of an early morning makes me think that every run

like this is a life – a little life, I know – but a life as full of misery and happiness and things happening as you can ever get really around yourself'. Similarly, Haruki Murakami (2008: 82–83) sees running as emblematic of life:

'People sometimes sneer at those who run every day, claiming they'll go to any length to live longer. But I don't think that's the reason most people run. Most runners run not because they want to live longer, but because they want to live life to the fullest. If you're going to while away the years, it's far better to live them with clear goals and fully alive than in a fog, and I believe running helps you to do that. Exerting yourself to the fullest within your individual limits: that's the essence of running, and a metaphor for life.'

As hyperbolic as it might sound, the sense of fulfilment alluded to by Sillitoe and Murakami is something running has enabled me to experience. There is one thing I regret when it comes to running: not having taken it up sooner in my adult life.

I opted for running because I felt that it was the kind of physical exercise that best suited me as a person. Other teachers might choose other forms of activity. The important thing is that all of us find the means by which we can allow our health to thrive and experience physical and mental well-being. Being unhealthy as individuals has a bearing on our capacity to lead fulfilling lives and it might also impinge on our ability and desire to teach.

Teacher attrition and retention

Research indicates that there is a relationship between high teacher attrition rates and poor working conditions (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2016). The most recent figures for teacher retention published by the Department for Education (2018b) in the UK indicate that teacher numbers are falling. A report issued by the National Audit Office (2017) shows that in 2016 almost 35,000 teachers left the profession for reasons other than retirement. As case studies published in *The Observer*



reveal, an increased workload, higher stress levels and lack of support are largely to blame for teachers quitting their job (Tapper, 2018). A YouGov survey of 1,250 education professionals in the UK found that 75% had experienced physical and mental health issues because of their job, which had also made a third feel stressed most or all of the time in the weeks prior to the study (Education Support Partnership, 2017). More than half of the respondents had considered leaving their job due to health pressures, while 72% felt that they did not receive adequate guidance about their health and well-being at work.

Teachers' dissatisfaction with the support they receive in the course of their career is a key reason for why they quit (Luekens *et al.* 2004). This is confirmed by a qualitative investigation which 'highlighted that most teachers are ... looking for solutions to be focused on reducing workload, consideration of teachers' well-being and for effective support at a school level to be available' (Department for Education, 2018a: 8). The House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (2018) found that the Department spent 15 times more on training new teachers than on supporting existing ones. This led it to conclude that 'Teachers are not getting enough good quality continuing professional development throughout their career, which has implications for teacher retention and quality and ultimately for

pupil outcomes' (Committee of Public Accounts, 2018: 7). What the above seems to underscore is that besides addressing the problem of increased workload, it is also vital to provide teachers with the support they deserve in order to safeguard their health and well-being. This is not only crucial for the sake of teacher retention. As shown by a review of the empirical literature, despite the need for more research to establish a clear connection between teachers' health and well-being and student outcomes, there is a common expectation that they are related (Bajorek *et al.* 2014).

Supporting teachers, supporting oneself

Teacher support can take various forms. Ensuring that teachers have quality means to develop as professionals is essential, but so is enabling them to look after their physical and mental health. Teachers do not just require development in pedagogical knowledge, skills and beliefs. They are not just professionals in terms of their duties and responsibilities. They are people who inhabit a body and a mind that need to be cared for as much as – if not more than – their role as teachers. For this reason, their physical and mental well-being need to be nurtured as well. Support might be provided via a staff well-being team (Lang, 2018), by



educating teachers about how to look after their mental health through physical exercise (Mental Health Foundation, n.d.), or by showing them how they can fit exercise around work (Marsh, 2015). Whatever form of support teachers receive in relation to their health and well-being, it is fundamental that they take ownership of the process by being willing to support themselves.

Given the strong link between physical and mental health (Ohrnberger *et al*, 2017), a possible starting point might be to do physical exercise. The World Health Organisation (2010) recommends that adults aged 18–64 do a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity every week. Alternately, they could do 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity or a combination of the two. Increasing the amount of physical exercise leads to additional health benefits. As teachers we are well aware of how important it is to look after our bodies in order to live a healthy life; however, sometimes the pressures of the job and of the other commitments in our lives might hinder us from making an effort and finding the time to do physical exercise.

In spite of how much it can contribute to teachers' well-being, physical exercise will not solve all the problems generating stress at the workplace. A heavy workload and other poor working conditions need to be effectively addressed via a range of solutions in order to minimise the pressure on teachers and improve satisfaction and retention rates. In fact, schools need to make a concerted

effort to reduce teachers' workload and associated stress (Mortimore, 2017). However, as teachers, we need to acknowledge that it is essential for us to take active steps to care for our health. Despite how daunting or improbable it might seem for us to do so, going for a run – or doing any other kind of physical exercise – might be one of the best forms of professional support we can provide ourselves with.

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The Value of Self

David Dodgson, Modern English Teacher blog, 07 February 2019

7pm and the marking about halfway done. I raise my head and stretched my shoulders feeling a little crack as I do so. Another hour or so and it will be done. Hopefully, the snow that is streaming down outside will not have blocked the roads by then. A few pangs of hunger are starting to kick in as the usual dinner time passes by.

8pm and nearly there now, just a couple of notebooks to go and all the grades collated and ready to be uploaded to the report system. Now, just to pop into the staffroom and make photocopies for the first period tomorrow, starting in... a little under 12 hours – yikes!

And what's this? An email at 8.15pm? At least someone else is working as late as me! I make the mistake of opening it. A request for a meeting before the start of the school day tomorrow at 7.40am...



Towards the end of last year, I found the above scenario playing out far more often than I would have liked. Sure, the occasional extra hours in the evening or the odd Saturday morning to ensure reports, assessment marking, and that session on learner-centeredness for the staff training day are all done is an inevitable part of working in education. However, when it happens every week, it can quickly get too much. The work-life balance soon tilts heavily to the more stressful side as a cycle begins of get up, go to work for 12 hours, come home, and sleep.

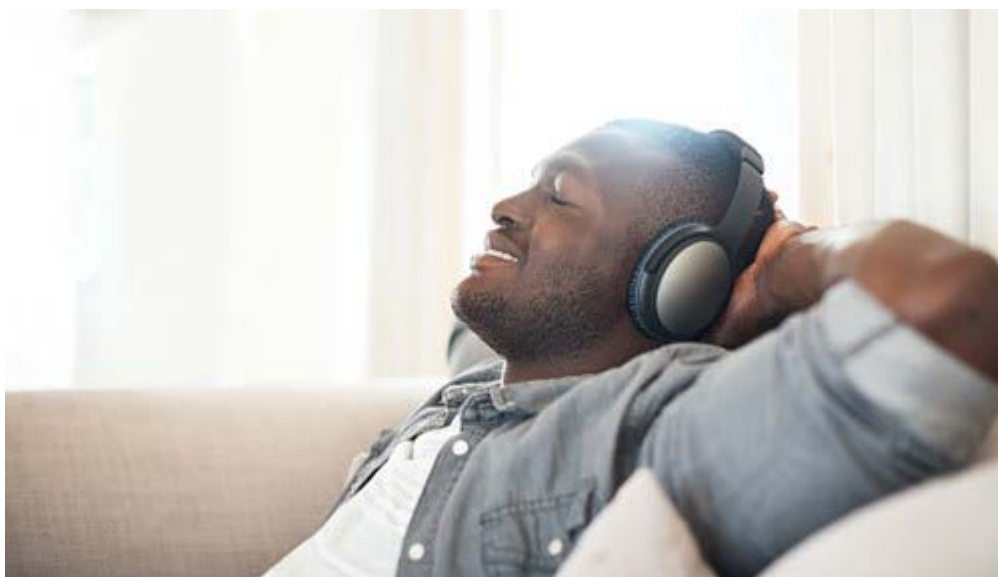
This term, I have made the decision to reset the balance. The only question was, how? When work has to be done, it has to be done and it has to take priority. First of all, I took a look at my own organisation and forward planning. A regular schedule for marking notebooks and recording assessed activities (my current school loves its trackable data!) has helped manage that side of things and has made the current cycle of reports much more efficient. It's also important to have the courage to speak up when the workload is too much. Any decent employer will listen and see what action can be taken and thankfully my line manager was proactive in offering advice and making changes to help manage the load.

It also became apparent that activities taking place outside work would have to be cut down or cut out. This was a tough call for me as I have spent a lot of time over the last several years engaging in self-driven professional development through social media, blogging, webinars, and online courses. This has played a significant role in my growth as a teacher, trainer, and academic manager through a constant source of inspiration to try out new ideas and aim high. Indeed, in the past, I had managed to engage with my online network while also managing a full-time job, undertaking a course of study, and enjoying family time with my wife and children.

So, what is different this time? I began to realise that I needed to take a break from my self-development activities (to see the impact of this on my conference attendance, have a look at this post of mine for ideas) so I could fully focus on the two key elements of my work-life balance – my full-time job and my family. After almost a decade of blogging, contributing to websites, giving webinars, online mentoring, and engaging with fellow professionals through Twitter chats and online forums, I decided it was time to step back. I began to turn down requests for articles or presentations (though not my blogs for *Modern English Teacher* of course!) and stop enrolling for any MOOC or online course of interest. I also turned down opportunities to go to conferences, even just as an attendee.

I then looked at what I was doing with my free time. Working late had led to a general feeling of tiredness and a tendency to spend weekend mornings lazing on the couch mindlessly scrolling through feeds on my phone. That wasn't helping as my days off contained little more than trips to the supermarket or running errands. I now make sure those mornings are about spending time with the kids and planning activities for the afternoon. I swapped time swiping through social media and clicking on links for reading (and not reading methodology chapters or professional development articles either but simply reading for pleasure).

At first, I was concerned that less time spent engaging with the wonderful world of online resources would somehow stall my development. I thought I would lose track of current trends and an air of staleness would creep into my classrooms. However, the opposite has been true. More time for myself and my family, more time to relax, and less time thinking about work has resulted in me having more energy for my classes, and more efficiency in tackling tasks at work before they mount up.



In the latest edition of *Modern English Teacher*, Daniel Xerri writes about the importance of taking care of our mental and physical well-being to be effective practitioners. He concludes that: 'Despite how daunting or improbable it might seem for us to do so, going for a run – or doing any other kind of physical exercise – might be one of the best forms of professional support we can provide ourselves with.'

I would add that simply making time to engage in any activities away from work be they reading, going for a hike, having a family day at the park, or blasting through a season on *Football Manager*, can be a great boon for our teaching and working life. With more energy comes more focus and a better ability to deliver in the classroom. I am not saying I will never again spend my own time on pursuing development online and/or outside working hours, but it is nice to take a break and allow my focus to fall elsewhere.

So, at a time when we can all enjoy the latest *Modern English Teacher* issue on learner-centeredness (one piece of professional reading I have not cut from my self-development routine!) I guess my focus now is more on self-centeredness and making times for the things I enjoy away from ELT.

What do you do to get away from it all? Do you find taking a complete break from work-related activities helps you approach the class with more energy? Or do you need that regular fix of CPD? Please share your thoughts in the comments!

What do you recharge the most – you or your phone?

Ushapa Fortescue stresses the need for self-care.

Our phones are always with us and because many of us can't live without them, we make sure they are always fully charged. One of the most frightening modern sights is our battery icon on the phone flashing or going red. We have chargers in our car, spare chargers at work, power packs, all to make sure the battery never runs down. So why don't we treat ourselves as well as we treat our phones?

Many of us are tired, overworked and stressed. However, there are simple ways that we can 'recharge ourselves' and improve our well-being at the same time.

The term 'self-care' might conjure up images of spa days and pampering sessions, but this is only part of it. The dictionary definition is 'the practice of taking an active role in protecting one's own well-being and happiness, in particular during periods of stress'. You don't have to spend hours or days on self-care, the key is a little and often approach.

In a fast-paced world, where we are often encouraged to multitask, taking a break can be seen as wasting time. I am going to encourage you in as many ways as possible to not just take *a* break but to

take *many* breaks. I believe this alone is a vital tool we have in improving our well-being.

When many electrical appliances stop working, we all rely on the same trick: turn them off and on again. The American writer Anne Lamott extends that idea to people: 'Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you.'

I spend a lot of time travelling. Something I have noticed is that I never see anyone doing nothing. What I mean by this is, as I look around at airports or train stations, people are all on their phones, watching videos and films, listening to music or reading and often doing more than one of these things at the same time. It has become the norm and is almost encouraged to be multitasking and using our time well.

But is this learned behaviour which goes against our natural state? Could multitasking itself be a myth? Through advances in neuroscience, it is now thought that human brains are not *multitasking* when doing more than one thing at once; we are in fact *task-switching*. Our brains move from one task to another so fast it feels like we are doing two things at once. In actual fact, we are continually switching between tasks, increasing the pressure we are under. As there is a lag between the switches, it is also not an effective use of time either.



To relieve the pressure of constantly doing something, can we learn to unplug ourselves for a while? One of the easiest ways of retaining and recharging energy in a busy working day is to take a break. Easier said than done when we use our non-work times to talk with colleagues, mark work, plan lessons, eat our lunch, etc. What I'm talking about is *really* taking a break.

A very simple awareness technique can bring us back to the present moment, the moment where our life happens. We live in the present, not in the past or future. The easiest way to come back to the present is through our bodies because they, unlike our minds which might wander, are always in the present.

Take five minutes and go somewhere quiet. You might feel the urge to check your emails or messages, but this is what your mind wants, not your body. So, take a few breaths and feel what is needed to make you feel better. Feel into your body and what it wants at that moment. It might be closing your eyes, stretching, going outside to get some fresh air or feeling the sunshine on your face. You might want to lie down or have a brisk walk. Let yourself be surprised by what your body might need. Set an alarm for five minutes so you don't have to worry about spending too long and can really relax into it. This sounds simple because it is. However, really switching off even for a short time, can be a new and powerful experience for many of us.

We all have lists of things that we have to do in a typical week. Many of these things aren't optional; we must find time for them. We become disciplined in doing other things. We know when learning a new task, like our students learning English, being disciplined with ourselves will help us get results. Imagine if you could experience being disciplined with yourself in a new and different way: a discipline of enjoyment!

Make a list of things you enjoy doing. Really write *everything* you enjoy doing. From big activities such as playing sports, to small pleasures like getting into a bed with fresh sheets. Once you have that list, you can start to become disciplined in



your enjoyment. Timetable the thing you enjoy into your schedule. Give enjoyment as much importance as the jobs you have to do because it is equally as important. Try putting 30 minutes a week in your diary and make sure you stick to it. If you choose a physical activity, you will most likely cause the release of more endorphins, dopamine and serotonin (sometimes called the happy hormones). Don't worry if your enjoyment isn't physical but something more cerebral. Whatever it is you enjoy will cause you to relax and your cortisol levels (the stress hormone) will likely drop. Actively doing things you enjoy will help you on an emotional and physical level.

Greater well-being and lower stress, not only makes you happier, it makes you work better. Viewed this way, self-care should be an essential part of your day, not a luxury. This is especially important for teachers as we are always thinking of the needs of others: our students, their parents, our schools. Start to make yourself a priority for at least some part of your week. If you don't make time for your wellness, you will be forced to make time for your illness.

When we want to make changes in our lives, we often look at how to change big things. However, our lives are made up of lots of small things. Making small changes can make a huge difference to our lives.

And one last piece of advice: go easy on yourself and don't forget to drink water and get sun. You're basically a houseplant with complicated emotions.



Ushapa Fortescue is a Graduate of Manchester Metropolitan University, has a CELTA, a Teacher Training certificate for the Post 16 sector and is a certified trainer for the Oxford Teacher's Academy courses. In the UK she has taught in statutory primary and secondary schools, post 16 adult education, private language schools, further education colleges and universities. She has worked and provided teacher training in numerous countries including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Croatia, Latvia, Russia, Egypt, Vietnam, Taiwan, China, Ukraine, Morocco, Romania and Slovenia. This has included leading teacher training workshops, presentations, speaking at conferences and short courses. She loves engaging and encouraging teachers so they can pass on a love of language learning to their students. She is passionate about introducing meditation in a fun, accessible way so more people gain better understanding and can benefit from the positive effects of meditation.

Starting the Year with some R&R

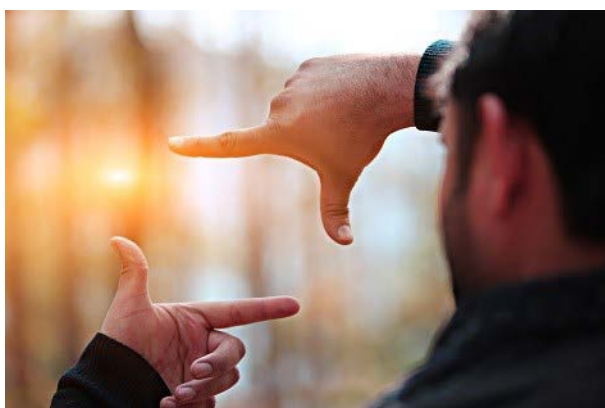
David Dodgson, Modern English Teacher blog, 24 January 2018

The New Year is a common time to reflect and make resolutions. In his first post of 2018, MET's resident blogger David Dodgson guides us through his process of reflecting on his teaching and development in 2017, and using those reflections to inform goals and ideas for 2018.

The New Year is a traditional period for reflection and resolution as we look back on the year that was and make plans and decisions about the year ahead. It is also a tradition that many of these intentions end up either forgotten within a couple of months, or (even worse) nag at the back of our minds for most of the year.

In my experience, this comes about because the resolutions are formed from generic reflections and lack structure. With a vague goal in mind ('do more sport' being a common one for me) and no clear idea of how to get there, it is no surprise that the good intentions do not amount to much.

The same can be true of our teaching reflections. Brief reflections can lead to well-intentioned but unclear goals for improvement. Using a simple structure can help guide us into better reflections and inform more realistic resolutions, and that is what I will share with you in this first post of 2018.



3-2-1

Catchy names always help! When looking back on my own teaching, whether that be at the end of a year, a term, or a busy week, I use the following guide:

- 3 things that went well
- 2 things that could have gone better
- 1 new thing I want to try

Looking back on 2017, my 3-2-1 goes like this:

3 Things that Went Well

There is sometimes a tendency when reflecting or giving/receiving feedback on our teaching to focus on the negative. There may be a positive comment dropped in the middle as a sweetener but the overall impression is 'must try harder'. By giving the better side more of a spotlight, we can give ourselves a deserved pat on the back and build more confidence.

- *My First IATEFL Talk*

This was a long-standing ambition that I realised last year – the opportunity to deliver a talk at the biggest ELT conference there is. I was lucky enough to be selected as a scholarship winner by LTSIG and spoke about the research I have done into teacher reflection for both my MA and Dip TESOL studies. Taking the time to revisit that research and condense it into an informative talk with practical suggestions was a task that proved very useful for me personally, acting as a reminder of the importance of reflection in our professional lives.

And, of course, IATEFL itself was an intense and enjoyable experience with plenty of great talks to attend and fellow ELT professionals to catch up with, including MET's own Robert McLarty, who I got to meet in person for the first time.

- *Differentiated lesson aims*

Changing focus to the classroom now, I developed a much better understanding of producing targeted lesson aims this year. In the past, I would always aim for a single, catch-all aim at the top of my plan, but in recent months, I have started to produce more comprehensive aims that cater to all students in the class. This has come about in part due to mentoring colleagues who are taking the DELTA as I put my own advice for them into practice. I not only consider the overall outcome and target language needed but I also indicate how my students will be able to show me they have achieved the aim. Finally, I have started to include 'levels' with my aims to allow for differentiation, 'Level 1' being the minimum expectation I have for my students, and levels 2 and 3 being like 'stretch goals' that I can use to demand more from my fast finishers and confident achievers (I sense a future blog topic coming on here!)

- *Exploring spaces*

Another development in my classroom practice this year has been the use of the physical space the lesson takes place in. I have been experimenting with new ways to get my students out of their seats to provide variety in interactions and encourage student-centred learning. One simple example of how I have done this through putting answer keys on the walls. This means that instead of me going over answers at the board with students volunteering answers one at a time, the students are up on their feet, self-checking and self-correcting – a teacher-fronted activity is suddenly more student-centred. Another 'on the wall' idea that has become a regular part of my class routine is the blank poster. I have started putting these up at the start of lessons and using them to capture lexis that emerges during the class, or having students brainstorm ideas or review new language on them. These are great as a reference for the duration of the lesson and beyond.

2 Things that Could Have Gone Better

It's not all been good, of course. Teaching a group of learners is such a dynamic process that there will always be ideas that don't work as well as expected and moments that just don't click. There are two key things to do in such cases – identify the problem, and think of ways to address it in the future.

- *The Same Old Tech*

ICT generally features in my lesson when it supports learning aims and/or facilitates an activity that would be more difficult otherwise. Examples of how I use technology include Quizlet for introducing/revising vocabulary, Kahoot for students to design their own quizzes, Padlet for collecting ideas and short pieces of writing, voice recorders for speaking practice, and many others. These activities, however, are ones I have been using for quite some time now and it has been a while since I have added something new. Now, we do not have to keep adding new activities to our classes, of course, but there is considerable value in experimenting with things. This allows us the chance to engage in a process of inquiry by trialling, analysing, and reflecting on a particular tool's usefulness. Over the last year, I have been recycling similar apps and activities. While they work well, it is time I challenged myself by trying something different and assessing its effectiveness.

- *Engaging Young Learners*

Classroom management is a tricky talent to get right. Each class is unique; with some we have to adapt our strategies and with some classes, it takes more time than with others to establish routines and encourage motivation. One struggle for me with my young learner classes in the latter part of 2017 was keeping their attention. Two of my classes in particular were very chatty and while I liked their energy, there were times when I just could not get everyone to settle down and listen. I tried various strategies such as a team point system with rewards and sanctions, frequent reminders of class rules, stopping activities and waiting ... but the effect was usually temporary. Part of the issue is undoubtedly connected to the personality of each group and my need to further adapt my approach in order to engage them. Another part of the issue is related to the above – familiar, routine activities can be useful in the young learner classroom but they can also have a negative side. Variety is also needed to re-engage the learners so I need to introduce some changes...



So, thinking about the year ahead:

1 New Thing I Want to Try

- New Realities

As we all know, technology develops at a pace that is hard to keep up with so I would like to try out some creative ideas I saw in Joe Dale's Ipad workshop at IATEFL (thus bringing this reflective cycle full circle). He showed us a number of creative apps to immerse learners in projects through avatars, animations, and backdrops. In this New Year, I am planning to try My Talking Avatar, MSQRD, and Yakit Kids to animate photos and add voiceovers. These apps potentially offer an avenue for students to get creative and engage in role-play. They allow students to personalise their language production without putting them personally on the spot. The opportunity to directly produce something instead of working through a pre-made Quizlet or Kahoot or adding to a shared Padlet board will hopefully engage them both in production and viewing each other's creations. As ever, I will be reflecting on the successes and challenges of these activities as I try them.

Over to You...

A reflective exercise for you to review the year that was, or make use of at the end of your current term/course:

- list three things that went well. Think about what made them a success and what impact they had.
- identify two things that did not go so well. Reflect on the reasons, and think about what you will do differently next time.
- think of one new idea that you want to try out in the near future. Give it a go and reflect on how well it worked.

Try this out with your students as well. It is a great way to get them to reflect on their learning and make plans for what they want to improve and how in the future.



How do you reflect on your teaching? And do you have any 'teaching resolutions for 2018? Share your reflections in the comments below!

Impostor syndrome in teaching and how to deal with it

Chia Suan Chong, English Teaching professional blog, 06 December 2018



When we think of insecure teachers, we often think of the newly-qualified CELTA trainee who is unsure about their knowledge of English tenses, or the non-native speaker teacher who worries about their possible lack of instinctive knowledge of English. Yet, I have heard many an experienced teacher (both native and non-native) confess to feeling like a fraud. Even those with expert-level knowledge of the language, its systems (lexis, grammar, pronunciation, discourse) and the pedagogy of language teaching are sometimes filled with self-doubt.

The experienced General English teacher might hesitate to take on new challenges to teach Business English, fearing that he/she might be called out for his/her own lack of experience in the business world.

The experienced Business English trainer might have to take on clients from the engineering industry, an industry he/she knows nothing about. He/She worries about the engineering knowledge he/she would be expected to have and the engineering jargon he/she might be lacking.

The experienced DELTA trainer who has done back-to-back DELTA courses for three years might now have to teach a General English class and wonders if he/she might be able to walk the walk as well as he/she talks the talk.

The experienced teacher is asked to take on an exam class teaching exam preparation skills for an exam he/she has never encountered before and is concerned that his/her students are going to catch him/her out on this before long.

The star teacher of the school gets a promotion and becomes the Director of Studies, managing 40 teachers and trainers. He/She worries about his/her complete lack of experience in management and is anxious that he/she might not be the best person for the job.

In a job that requires us to be so many things and play so many roles all at once, it is no surprise that many teachers feel like impostors in their own field. The more we develop, the more we realise that there is just so much we don't know. For some of us, we might be happy to keep 'winging it till we make it' and keep striving to be better at what we do. But for some of us, this feeling can become debilitating and have a negative impact on our self-worth and ambition.

This crippling belief that we don't deserve to be where we are is part of a psychological phenomenon called impostor syndrome. Characterised by a feeling that we are the only ones so grossly inadequate in our jobs, we live in fear of the day someone is going to reveal us for the frauds we are, and this leads us to be constantly afraid of taking on new challenges. Ironically, this is something that could strike the experienced and the high achievers, possibly because the higher up we go in our careers, the more aware we become of the experts in our field and how far away we are from being great at our jobs.

While some feelings of inadequacy could serve as impetus to seek more professional development, these feelings might potentially become overwhelming, and if left unaddressed, could grow and fester and hinder career development.



But impostor syndrome can be dealt with, starting with these five simple steps.

1. Become aware of your feelings and their impact

Instead of sweeping these feelings under the carpet and telling yourself they don't matter, it is important that we acknowledge them and understand them. Where do these feelings come from? Are they borne out of anxiety about a new job or an unfamiliar task? Are they triggered by a bad experience or some negative feedback from a student or a manager? Are they exacerbated by a need to compare yourself to others? Are you a perfectionist? Don't seek to blame others but acknowledge the feelings they give rise to.

How are these feelings impacting on you? Are they causing you to avoid the unfamiliar? Are they making you nervous about getting feedback? What kind of effects are you feeling on a daily basis?

2. Find people to talk about this to

There are two reasons for doing this. One, talking about your feelings can help you reflect on them, understand them and discover potential ways to deal with them. Two, you might realise that you are not alone in feeling this way, and this revelation can be powerful for some. As they say, there is strength in numbers.

Consider talking to someone at work like a colleague, a mentor, or a manager – someone who you think is likely to be sympathetic and able to give you their time and a listening ear. Alternatively, consider talking to someone you don't work with, e.g. a fellow teacher you met online. Some of my best conversations about teaching have taken place on messaging platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook and Line. Sometimes, it can be easier talking to someone who is not in the exact same teaching context as you are.

3. Recognise your abilities and your achievements

Feedback is a funny thing: it is so easy to ignore the positives and obsess about the negatives. Take time to think about your talents and capabilities: What are you good at? What skills have you developed along the way? What can you do now that you couldn't do before? What are some of the things you've achieved? Think about the students you've helped, the trainees you've supported, and the colleagues you've inspired. You didn't get to where you are now purely by luck. Give yourself the recognition you deserve for your hard work and experience.

4. Understand the expectations of your students/clients

What exactly are you being hired to be? A linguist? An expert at language learning? A coach that can motivate and help students/clients become better? An ESP professional who can analyse the written discourse of a particular field and teach their student to write in a similar fashion?

You might realise that your students/clients are not expecting you to be all things – that your engineering clients are not expecting you to be an expert at their field but would like you to focus on helping them communicate more effectively in meetings; that your students might prefer fewer lectures with linguistic jargon and metalanguage, and more exposure to useful language practice; that language learners might not notice when you are not optimising the use of a particular methodology but would most certainly tell the difference between a motivating lesson and an unmotivating one.

So, get to know the needs of your students and focus on how you can go about fulfilling those needs. Set realistic goals, and if there's something you are not so good at doing, now is the time to start working on it. After all, the best way to learn something is by teaching it.

5. Understand there is no such thing as 'a perfect teacher'

In your imagination, what does a perfect teacher look like? What are they able to do? What qualifications or achievements would they have? When we start to try and quantify 'a perfect teacher', we start to realise that there is no such thing as a perfect teacher. Some teachers are good in certain areas and have certain skills, but many of these are learnt and refined through hard work and experience.

So instead, consider what in your mind 'a great teacher' might be. What knowledge and skills do they have? What are they able to help their students with? How do you measure up? Use that gap in knowledge/skill as motivation to improve yourself and remember Malcom Gladwell's 10,000 hour rule – you can become a world-class expert at anything you put your mind to if you do it for 10,000 hours. In essence, practice is key.

If you suffer from impostor syndrome, these five steps might be only the beginning of your journey in battling those negative feelings, but remember: rather than letting yourself get sucked into a downward spiral of self doubt, take charge of the situation and know that any talent, knowledge or skill can be learnt and developed. You only have to give yourself time.



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Think positive!

Paul Bress gives advice on how to be a more self-confident teacher.

It's difficult to read a lifestyle magazine these days which doesn't contain the word *self-esteem*. Self-esteem seems to be being portrayed as the key ingredient in success, happiness and fulfilment. Picture for a moment two businesspeople; they are identical in terms of their qualifications and experience, but they have radically different levels of self-esteem. Which would you tip to lead a more positive life in their organisation?

Similarly, consider two English teachers, again with identical backgrounds. However, one has a positive self-image, is more assertive, communicates clearly both verbally and non-verbally, and is skilled at connecting with others, while the other is the exact opposite. It doesn't take a genius to deduce that the former is likely to have more success and happiness both inside and outside class.

Before we look at the role of self-confidence in the language classroom, I'd like to consider its role in our lives in general. I want first to ask (and answer) one question.

How can you increase your self-confidence?

1 Make a list of all your positive characteristics.

By putting these things down on paper, you are bringing these important qualities alive. Everyone will find positive qualities if they think long and hard enough!

2 Visualise yourself demonstrating all these characteristics.

This is a Neuro-Linguistic Programming technique. By doing this, you are effectively creating your own reality. So, if you described yourself as 'charismatic' in point 1, picture yourself, maybe wearing eye-catching clothes, communicating with people in an effortlessly powerful way.

3 Remind yourself that you are in charge of your own fate (and that your potential is unlimited).

This is a liberating mindset. It also empowers you to take responsibility. As a result, it's much more likely to lead to positive behaviour than if you convince yourself that you are a victim.

4 Constantly look out for how people treat you in a positive way.

There is an awful lot of positive benefit to be had from studying our everyday lives – and it's a big waste when we fail to do this. Things you could focus on could vary from particularly attentive treatment from a waiter, to your partner looking into your eyes and saying that he or she really loves you.

5 Stick up for yourself when you're being maltreated.

Life clearly has its downsides. However, if you are treated in a rude manner, and if you then confront the other person, this is more likely to have a positive effect on your confidence than if you behave like a shrinking violet.

Having considered some methods/techniques for increasing self-confidence in everyday life, I'd now like to turn my attention to the language classroom. Here's another question, directed specifically at teachers, together with some answers.

How can you act in a more self-confident way in class?

1 Plan your lesson (and go over the lesson in your mind first).

This is similar to points 1 and 2 in the last section. By visualising the class you are about to teach, you are increasing the likelihood of what you want actually happening. For example, you could imagine yourself lavishing praise on a weak, but hard-working, student, and you could imagine the look of satisfaction on that student's face.

2 Look at the students when you peak to them.

Even if this feels counter-intuitive, it's still highly recommended. In fact, with practice, you should feel your body gradually filling up with confidence as you maintain your gaze.

3 Speak loudly and clearly.

You can actually become more self-confident by speaking in a self-confident way.

4 Give clear instructions.

If this is a weak area for you, you can even write the instructions down verbatim (eg *Now get into pairs*) – and then say them clearly. Use body language and gestures to reinforce the meaning. It's vital that students understand what you are saying at key moments in a lesson.

5 Give clear language feedback (on student performance).

This is difficult for novice teachers (because they are often preoccupied with their own movements). Nevertheless, it's very important to devote some time each lesson to listening *very carefully* to the content and form of what students are saying – and giving feedback which will enable them to reformulate their language if there are problems. This is a 'bread and butter' task that self-confident teachers are usually very good at.



Most teachers do, gradually, accrue confidence during their careers, but some don't. Those that don't might try to increase their self-confidence outside the classroom by following the recommended steps above. In addition, they can take these steps to increase their self-confidence *inside* the classroom. Both the 'outside' and 'inside' work should influence each other in a constructive way. Ideally, the teacher in question should eventually find him- or herself in a virtuous circle of effective communication – behaving more and more confidently, and identifying more and more with that confident behaviour. **ETP**



Paul Bress works both in the fields of personal growth and TEFL and has published very widely in both areas. Paul is a life-long, nonstop learner – he learns more from everyday experience than from formal research. His life coaching website is www.bemycoach.co.uk.

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Powerful language II

- e) Success is so elusive!
f) I just don't seem to have the knowledge.

Suggested answers: a) relationship/relate b) management/manage c) respect/are respecting d) What would it take to be able to organise things well? e) In what ways do you want to succeed? f) What exactly is it that you don't know? or What do you know in relation to that?

You might also ask students to suggest (or identify) those suffixes which often indicate abstract nouns and then offer a verbal, adjectival or adverbial alternative. How can you tell if it's a concrete noun (which can't easily be changed), or an abstract noun (which can)? If you can't put it in a container, then it's abstract. Some examples to get you started:

-ity	spontaneity (to act spontaneously), creativity (to be creative/to create), stupidity (to act stupidly), objectivity (to be objective/to consider something objectively)
-ation	information (to inform), organisation (to organise), imagination (to imagine), determination (to be determined), communication (to communicate), expectation (to expect), explanation (to explain)
-ing	planning (to plan), learning (to learn), teaching (to teach) -ship relationship (to relate), friendship (to be friends/friendly with), leadership (to lead)
-ment	commitment (to commit), enjoyment (to enjoy), management (to manage), achievement (to achieve), acknowledgement (to acknowledge), improvement (to improve)
-ness	happiness (to feel/be happy), loneliness (to feel/be lonely), tiredness (to feel/be tired), sadness (to feel/be sad)
-ion	depression (to feel/be depressed), confusion (to feel/be confused)
-ism	dynamism (to act dynamically/be dynamic), pessimism (to feel/be pessimistic)
(same)	respect (to respect), love (to love), work (to work), change (to change)
(miscellaneous)	life (to live), success (to succeed), knowledge (to know), freedom (to be free), failure (to fail), energy (to be energetic), courage (to be courageous), behaviour (to behave), belief (to believe), fear (to feel/be afraid), thought (to think)

Changing tenses

Grammatical tenses are influential too – all the more so if we reframe them and call them ... relaxes! (a concept Jane first heard about from Gerry Schmidt, in a language seminar in 1994.)

The tense we use to describe our experience gives it a time reference (present, past, future), or implies that it is more or less likely (e.g. First or Second Conditional). If you talk (and think) of your achievements as in the past (*I used to remember things easily*), then that's where they will remain. Talking to yourself differently, by making a positive affirmation (*I can remember things easily if I make up my mind to*) can help to bring skills into the present, and make them potentially available again. If you've done it once, you can do it again. (Won't you?)

On the other hand, if someone says *I'm having trouble with conditionals*, the use of the Present Continuous means it's very much part of their current experience and it's probably very hard for

them to experience anything beyond it. A challenge might be something like: Tell me about the problems you've been having with conditionals ... Using the Present Perfect (continuous) tense, and slipping their trouble at least partly into

the past, makes it less present. It allows them to begin to move away from the problem, freeing them to focus on possible solutions.

The English Present Perfect tense is very useful because it deals with and links both past and present. It acknowledges present experience and moves it into the past at the same time. Using the Simple Past: *Tell me about this terrible problem you had ...* is much less subtle and respectful. By completely disregarding their present experience, we risk totally alienating them.

If your native language is not English, and is one without a direct equivalent of the Present Perfect tense, how else might you express simultaneous ideas of past and present or otherwise help a person move beyond a problem? (You might say something like 'That sounded really difficult.' You are putting their telling of the story to you into the past, but there's also a slight ambiguity as to whether you're also referring to the story itself being past.)

What could you say to people who say the following?

- a) I'm feeling really negative about everything.
b) I'm finding it so difficult to remember all these irregular verbs.
c) I'm so confused about phrasal verbs!

Suggested answers: a) What have you been feeling negative about particularly? b) Which ones in particular have you been finding it difficult to remember? c) What exactly have you been confused about?

The whole question of the subtle use of language is a huge one and would really take a book of its own. All we've been able to do is give an introduction to the sort of things you could be looking for and challenging with a view to improving communication and learning in your classroom.

We hope too that we've been able to give some pointers towards a different way of presenting language to your students.



Jane Revell and Susan Norman have just published *In Your Hands*, a new book on NLP and ELT (Saffire Press 1997).

Motivational mantras

Douglas Williams has ten timely tips for teachers.

We've all had days when we question what we do, doubt ourselves as teachers – perhaps even consider quitting altogether. Here are some motivational points to remember after a bad day in the classroom; their aim is to guide the disaffected teacher back to a positive mindset and, ultimately, more job satisfaction.

1 Value your contribution.

Whoever the student is, you can teach them something. Even the strongest advanced student can learn new vocabulary, work on their pronunciation and develop their skills. Conversely, an absolute beginner with seemingly no language learning aptitude (perhaps the most challenging kind of student) will show progress if the correct approach is chosen by the teacher – and they are given enough time.

2 Don't take all the blame for a bad class.

It may seem obvious, but the success of the class depends not only on you; it depends on the students as well. Whilst reflection by the teacher on what has happened when things go wrong is essential for improving rapport with a class and meeting their needs, for teachers to put responsibility for the learners' achievements solely on themselves is dangerous. The flip side of this, of course, is that you can't take all the credit for a good class!

3 Look for the positive aspects of the job, not the negatives.

Yes, the pay is low and the students can drive you mad, but moaning about those things day in day out in the staffroom is a real morale-killer. Although I can sympathise with a heart-felt complaint from a fellow teacher, it's important not to let negative vibes be the norm. Remind yourself that you are making a difference and doing a creative, intellectually stimulating job. Find positives in the teachers you work with, bounce ideas off each other and learn from your colleagues.

4 Be realistic with your aims.

In many teaching situations, the chances are you will be teaching one class or learner for a short time, so setting achievable objectives is key. To avoid disappointing yourself and your students, make it clear what they can expect to learn (or acquire) in the time that you have available.

5 Mix it up.

Variety is the spice of the ELT job, whether it be in materials, correction techniques or classroom layout. Adding variety will avoid the common 'Groundhog class' syndrome, where you get into a predictable cycle of doing the same kinds of activities every lesson, using the same lesson shape or methodology. Both you and your students will benefit from breaking the routine.

6 Be open to humour.

Take every opportunity in class to have a laugh with your students. Encourage spontaneous anecdotes. Don't rush past funny mistakes students make; often these are the most memorable parts of the lesson and can be valuable in terms of language feedback.

7 Be prepared for criticism.

It's a difficult balancing act at times, and it's often a case of keeping *most* students happy for *most* of the time. If a student complains about your class, don't sulk about it and hold a grudge; respond positively by talking to them one-to-one and finding out the root of their complaint. Be approachable and attentive, or they will have no choice but to go over your head to your superiors.

8 Develop, don't stagnate.

One reason for feeling demotivated as a teacher is the uncertainty of what can come next on your CV. There are numerous avenues for continuing your professional development, from speaking at conferences to getting an article published in a teachers' magazine or taking on further responsibilities in your school.

9 Become a student yourself.

By learning another language, you increase your ability to empathise with the situation your students face. Take every opportunity to learn about your students' native languages in class, too.

10 And finally ... don't work too hard!

Limit the amount of time you spend preparing classes by using this time more efficiently. Re-use or adapt existing materials, and if creating new materials, set a deadline and stick to it. Some of the best lessons I've taught have used either no traditional materials or those I've whipped up in a panic with ten minutes to go! Mark with a correction code or focus on particular types of mistake, politely decline students' requests to mark work unrelated to your lessons and think carefully before adding students as friends on *Facebook*! Aside from the risks of appearing unprofessional, if your students start seeing you as more a friend than a teacher, unfortunately there will always be some who will try to take advantage of that.



So, at the end of a bad day, just remember: there's no such thing as the perfect teacher. The best we can do is to walk into every class with optimistic assumptions, pay attention as much as possible to our students' needs and regularly evaluate our own performance. **ETP**



Douglas Williams is a freelance trainer for the London School of English and, since starting his first TEFL job in 2006, has taught in Indonesia, New Zealand and the UK. He holds the Cambridge DELTA and is currently taking an MA in ELT and Applied Linguistics at King's College London, UK. His academic interests include assessment, learner autonomy and technology in the classroom.

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