

ELT



Ireland bulletin

IN THIS EDITION

How I moved from ELT to EAP and what I learned along the way

by Stephen Bruce (Page 4)

Thoughts on digital re-entry

by Mary Shepherd (Page 5)

Being your own DoS

by Rob McComish (Page 7)

Film-making as student-centred learning environment

by Vanja Fazinic (Page 8)

Creative projects in the language classroom

by Colete Godkin (Page 11)

Stepping Away From the Mirror: Effective Approaches to Reflective Practice

by Conor O'Reilly (Page 14)

ELT Burnout and what to do about it

by Stephen Cloak (Page 15)

Getting EAQUALS: A brief "How to"

by Nadine Early (Page 17)

When going through Delta ... keep going

by Damian Cunniffe (Page 19)

The Delta exam rollercoaster

by James Duggan (Page 21)

Teaching pronunciation in a brain-friendly way and how to cater for different learning preferences

by Darek Bukowski (Page 23)

We all make mistakes!

by John Ryan (Page 26)

Chunk it up in the ESL classroom!

by Touria Jouilla (Page 28)

No. 2

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ELT Ireland features (Pages 1-3)

Welcome to our Second Bulletin

by Dr. Lou McLaughlin

The Secrets of Membership by James Gaffney

Social Media Numbers by Joanne Mitten

Treasuring ELT Ireland by Liliana O'Reilly

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Teaching EAP, to me, is an avenue the long serving ELT teacher should explore. There are opportunities out there – far more in the UK, but I believe that things in Ireland are beginning to change. As more students come to Ireland intending to study at university, as the needs of these students become better understood, there will be increased demand for teachers to help them. In the UK, there is a global forum for EAP professionals called BALEAP (it used to be called the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes but I think it prefers to see itself as a name in and of itself rather than an acronym). At their 2015 conference, much of the conversation was around the topic of academic discourse. Essentially, English for Academic Purposes is no longer seen as something exclusively for international students. Instead, the conventions and language of academic discourse are viewed as a particular set of skills that all students need help learning, regardless of where they come from. As a result, many of these language support providers in universities are dropping the English part from their names and rebranding as Academic Skills. In essence, there is a growing view that academia is a unique place, with its own language and conventions, that can baffle and overwhelm the outsider. An exam can never really teach all of that. An EAP teacher can.

Further reading:

BALEAP: This is the forum for people working in EAP. Has very good jobs board and information about CPD opportunities and their conferences, baleap.org/home000

Teaching EAP An excellent blog on various areas of interest in EAP. Dr. Alex Ding is especially good on where EAP sits within the wider university and the identity of EAP, teachingeap.wordpress.com

Alternatively: Twitter – lots of wonderful people in EAP at #tleap

Thoughts on digital re-entry

by Mary Shepherd (ATC)

Having stepped out of the classroom for a few years, re-entry appeared the same at first sight: same classroom formations, same issues, same grammar, but there are a few extra wires and a yoke sticking out of the wall overhead. Not daunting. Until you realise that the smart board requires different writing, and you need to know what the wires do, where they go and how they differ between devices. And everyone is addicted to their phones.

Well, if you can't beat them, join them. There's no time like the present. Strike while the iron's hot. You aren't getting any younger. Just do it. All the posters tell me so. Cliches and proverbs aside, I really did have to decide if I was going to get on board the tech train or just retire quietly. Tech isn't going away and students are more tech-savvy with every month that goes by.

So, how did I do it? Start I mean. I'm learning something new every day – just like my learners. I took the bull by the horns. Swallowed my pride and my 25 years experience and ... gulp ...asked for help.

Simple things to start with. Each class had at least one student who was more than willing to be the IT guy. I also twinned with a tech savvy teacher and after a few months I got the hang of what wire goes in where; it was just a matter of making sure the volume wasn't left on mute and so on. I also found out that by using my own personal hotspot on my 4g phone I could access wifi if I didn't want to plug the internet cable in directly. But that is going too fast. I must explain that each of these things took about a month to master. That was hard. Maybe because I was the same age as some of the students' mothers, they seemed to be more patient with me than I was with myself. Frequently, I caught those across the classroom glances which my teenager has also mastered. These say: 'sheesh, typical dinosaur, will she never learn.' So I adapted. I learned to laugh at myself and they learned the phrase 'bear with me'.



A good egg. Joining the #ELTChinwag on twitter is a good start to getting technical.

Pic by ELT Ireland

I was delighted to see a digital ELT conference in Ireland. Armed with enthusiasm and my own iPhone, along I went. Terrified and excited too. This is what I learned:

Day one: I realised very quickly that I had some way to go. As I was writing all these new websites and coded expressions (tags?) furiously in a copybook, I glanced up to find others simply lifting their phone or tablet and taking a photo. Could it be that simple?

It's the end of photocopying as we know it: People connect to the world with their devices. Coursebooks are considered as merely a springboard for other media. Paper is not cool. The waste of paper has always irked me, but I did it as much as anyone else. Now, just get students to take a photo with their phones of the image you want them to use. Great! They can adjust the size themselves. That saves me time and the planet paper, requires no wifi and is a very useful way of making sure students are using their device for what you want, rather than checking their messages. 'Take it down' has been replaced by 'click and save'.

Day two: I started taking photos too. The workshops were very useful. Of course what I took home was all the amazing new websites - but did I use them all? No. I went home with a fantastic new (to me) thing called EdModo which was like Facebook but for schools. I wowed about it for about ten minutes before my teenager informed me that her school had been using it for years, and did I want to see how they used it? I had no idea that all homework was available, that teachers' availability was there for all to see and most importantly for me, that parents have access to their kids' work - a fact which had eluded me beforehand. I'd been aware of Facebook, joined as a parent of a teenager and discovered messaging, group chats and some of the pitfalls. But I wanted to know how to use it just for teaching. Some said they had private groups with current students and others only to keep in touch when students leave. Now I do both, having created a class group for my students and shown them how to join and participate. It was quite the commitment though as I posted Christmas cracker jokes in December this year as part of my advent calendar to teach B2 and C1 students about puns, knock knock jokes and the cultural intricacies of English humour. I was never so happy to see Santa arrive on the 24th and say - stop now, put the phone away and don't use FB for a week! Best present ever. And another lesson learnt.

The other thing I learned that day was what Twitter was and how it could be practical as opposed to hearing what celebrities think about in taxis. ELT Ireland fortnightly chinwag sessions seemed to use Twitter sensibly. So I got myself a twitter account (no photo or details) and banned my family from the kitchen at 8.30 the following Monday. Turned on the iPad, found the Twitter app and a message from Peter Lahiff inviting me to go. Help! Panic ensued. What on earth do these symbols mean? Talk about not prepared. I text messaged my Director of Studies from my phone and with the two devices going, was guided patiently through the process, of using the hashtag, #ELTChinwag, to find and then contribute to the conversation. I definitely recommend a handholding for the first one or two sessions, then regular visits to get used to it. What was the panic? Jargon? New vocabulary. Hold on a minute, isn't that what I do? Teach new vocabulary? Sigh of relief. I then found the app on my phone and found it easier to use. FB is easier on the phone too. Guess what? I'm using my phone almost as much as my students are.

**“Students
make great
technology
teachers.
Who knew?”**

Then there are the apps. BBC news, the Guardian, the Irish Times - all get used in class, not to mention my latest craze: TED. Ted talks are remarkably accessible, come with tapescripts if needed and are short. There is something for every topic in every unit in every coursebook ever written. It is just as we thought - the internet is the biggest library on the planet. So Youtube and google images are timesaving and instant, Ted is enlightening and who cares that the Metro is gone? The verb of the century so far for me is 'to Google'. 'Google it' is the new 'look it up'.

So I progressed. Each month I found myself trying something different, and each time I found myself learning. I recently discovered that you need a google account to make a Youtube channel. Students make great technology teachers. Who knew?

ELT Ireland helped to put on the digital ELT conference again the following year and this time I was better armed and had an aim: to start a blog. Which I did. One entry only, which said: 'Watch this space'.

References:

edmodo.com

digital-elt.eu (Organiseres of Digital ELT)

twitter.com/hashtag/eltchinwag