

elt NOTES!

CCA Teachers' Newsletter

UPDATES, TIPS AND RESOURCES

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From Theory to Practice



ABLA ELT 2023



HOT TOPICS!

By Astrid Cruz – Curricular Design AS

With over 1300 attendees from all over Latin America, 5 plenary sessions led by international speakers, and 82 concurrent sessions (on-site and online), the ABLA ELT 2023 turned out to be a huge success for the different binational centers from the region, and for Colombo Bogotá, in particular.

*As 2023 continues to unfold, new trends and challenges emerge in the educational field, and the **ABLA ELT 2023**, which took place last Friday, May 26th, was a space to learn about, ponder, and discuss them. Every single topic from the sessions is prominent and significant in the world around us, and every presenter contributed greatly to the professional development of many. This article brings about the top 10 hot topics from the **ABLA 2023**. In identifying these trends, an analysis of the most coveted sessions (online, on-site, and plenary) of the ABLA was implemented, as well as an exploration of the ideas for discussion, training, and presentations from the TESOL calendar 2023.*

1. Technology in the classroom and AI

The recent, and sometimes questioned, boom of technologies in this century is an undeniable area to both explore and discuss in the educational field. We have witnessed technology becoming increasingly accessible, now more than ever, within our grasp. Tools such as cell phones, tablets, laptops, smartwatches, and even Artificial Intelligence, which can easily write an essay for a student within seconds, are barely one or two clicks away. This technological revolution, paired with the COVID crisis, put us, teachers, in a position where technology needed to be a factor in the classes –in case it wasn't before-, in a situation no longer about 'if', but 'how'. In this regard, two key takeaways from the ABLA ELT this year are (1.) AI and technology will not take over the teaching role, but it is now paramount for teachers to lead pupils to be critical about their usage of technologies, to reflect upon it, and to integrate it as part of the classes, and (2) the teaching role under these circumstances is no longer one to facilitate knowledge acquisition, but rather one that guides students towards becoming world citizens who can use technology responsibly, integrate it in their lives critically, while still showcasing their most humane, empathetic, creative, and caring side. Technology is here to stay, but it's still a teaching aid. The teacher remains the pivotal figure in preparing authentic individuals, a task that technology is still far from accomplishing... for now.

2. Assessment for learning

Assessment is critical to students' learning process. Not only does it offer information about what needs to be improved, it also provides ideas as to strengths students have, and recognizes efforts and progress achieved. Whereas assessment of learning is related to grades and reports (Broadfoot, P., Daugherty, R., Gardner, J., Harlen, W., James, M., & Stobart, G. 2002), assessment for learning accounts for giving students updates on their progress providing input about where students are in terms of a learning goal, where they should be, and how to get there (Stiggins, R. J. 2002). Some ways in which assessment for learning can be brought into the



Our General Manager, Janet Van Deren in the ABLA ELT Opening ceremony

classroom are: showing the learning targets of the students (Exit profiles, for example), implementing reflective assessment moments, giving descriptive feedback, adjusting instructions according to class performance, and promoting self- and a growth mindset. Some consequences of assessment for learning that play out in the classroom are: students are more confident and see mistakes as learning opportunities, communication about performance is open and honest, interest in learning prevails over interest in passing only, and students' self-awareness increases (Stiggins, R. J. 2002).

3. Diversity and Inclusion, and Intercultural Competence:

English Language Teaching seeks to cater to English learners. What happens when English Learners are diverse, come from different backgrounds, and exhibit different characteristics in personality or worldview? People are preparing themselves to speak English from all over the place, hence the need to see ELT through the lens of diversity, creativity, and intercultural. Having a classroom with students who have different cultural identities doesn't necessarily stand for an intercultural and diversity-welcoming class. Thus, educators are invited to identify asymmetry in their students, and implement strategies that enable individual skills and learning goals to merge harmoniously. Teaching is sensitive to different cultural styles of learning and seeing the world. One effective approach for educators to integrate diversity, inclusion, and intercultural competencies into the classroom is by employing reflective and communicative activities. These activities not only encourage the use of the target language but also foster the discovery of shared experiences that forge a sense of community and unity. Simultaneously, they promote an appreciation of the diverse qualities that make each individual unique, without creating barriers between us and those around us.

4. Student's self-regulation

Self-regulation encompasses the efforts and strategies implemented by one to alter one's actions and responses (Vohs, K. D., & Baumeister, R. F. 2004). In education, self-regulation is a key factor in the learning process since it entails having both will and skill to learn (Greene, J. A. 2017), and it pervades all aspects of life. As students are exposed to an overwhelming amount of information, self-regulation is key to not just aiding them in their acquiring knowledge, but discerning which of the messages they're receiving from the numerous external sources are worth sticking to. One way in which self-regulated learning can be fostered among students is through a deep analysis of learning strategies that are initially introduced explicitly by the teacher, then analyzed thoroughly and implemented by the students, and thirdly, adopted autonomously and critically by the students. Open-ended tasks such as projects, portfolios, and performance assessments are effective motivators to become more self-regulated, too (Paris, S. G., & Paris, A. H. 2001).



Culture and art also played an important role in the ABLA ELT conference.

5. Environmental awareness

With the depletion of natural resources, the emergence of imbalanced and unpredictable weather patterns due to global warming, the degradation of our air quality, and the ever-growing population, life on Earth is inevitably facing a significant threat. Enabling pupils to feel and care for the planet is a shared responsibility from and for everyone. In the education field, offering opportunities for discussion through the target language about the impact of our own practices on the environment can lead to environmental awareness. One way in which this skill can be fostered in classes is through projects and discussions about the local environmental problems: trash on the streets, air pollution, lack of care for the tress, etc. A cause-consequence conversation that leads to taking action is always a good way to start promoting genuine interest in protecting and preserving the environment in our students.

6. Global skills

The ABLA was all about global skills. To understand what they are, it is key to understand the world we live in: interconnected, intercultural, technological, and diverse. Students need to prepare for it, and thus, global skills are required. Global skills are the set of abilities and strategies that enable the citizenry to better perform and succeed in the 21st century life. These include Communication and collaboration, Creativity and critical thinking, Intercultural competence and citizenship, Emotional self-regulation and wellbeing, and Digital literacies. Global skills are nowadays one of the milestones of ELT. One way to embed these skills in the classroom is to start small: incorporate language activities that lead to the developing of a certain global skill (Mercer, S., Hockly, N., Stobart, G., & Galés, N. L. 2019). As it was brilliantly illustrated by Neil Ainsworth in the ABLA ELT conference last Friday, May 26th, you can take the topic of the class and, by asking students to use the target language of it, have them redirect their ideas over the skill you want them to develop.

For example, if the class is about something as simple and generalized as the colors, you can say: some people think pink is a feminine color. Is it okay for men to wear pink? What could be the implication of restricting pink only to feminine traits? As you can see, while sticking to the topic of the class, you can foster in-depth reflection and preparation on up-to-date topics that do affect our learners' lives through and through. While it is sensible to say that time is a factor and we may struggle to include global skills in the classroom, starting with small questions to approach and cover global skills in the classroom is certainly possible.

7. SEL skills

Socio-emotional skills link the classroom environment to the social world learners will encounter as adults, and face in their everyday moments. The enterprise of bringing SEL into the classroom aims also at bringing situational learning to the lifelong learning pupils take from their classes. A meta-analysis of pre-school prevention programs found out that SEL programs and approaches bring about cognitive and academic benefits (Nelson, G., Westhues, A., & MacLeod, J. 2003). Fostering empathy, respect, kindness, listening actively, and cooperation and fairness guarantees that students will be more responsive to the class, the contents, and feedback. This will enable them to develop their own persona and will help them guide their decisions inside and outside the classroom. Do teachers really buy into SEL? Well, believe it or not, teachers are huge advocates for SEL. Every teacher consistently strives to create a safe and nurturing environment within the classroom, while also guiding each student towards personal growth by setting a positive example alongside the support of their parents. One idea to implement SEL in the classroom is to offer spaces for learners to be vulnerable: to express their emotions openly towards each other and towards themselves in peer or self-assessment moments.



The State Department supports and celebrates our many professional development initiatives.

8. Innovation

Innovation is, by definition, the development of new ideas and methods. This concept, although frequently associated with technological growth, doesn't limit itself to it. When dealing with innovation in the classroom, the idea broadens up to methodological practices, classroom expressions, theoretical frameworks, technology and interpersonal skills. Innovation in the classroom can be made evident through creative expressions, problem-solving activities, opportunities for revision, bringing up different cultural, political, social, and pedagogical ideas. Some practical approaches of innovation in education include introducing and implementing flipped learning, adopting problem and project-based learning, and favoring activities that foster deep-communication where there are no right or wrong answers.

9. Testing tools and preparation strategies

Language testing skills are key to English speakers in the current market and globalized world. As more jobs require handling English, the demand for proving a B1, B2, or C1 level has likewise skyrocketed. In preparing ourselves and our students to face an English test, it is key to provide the test-takers with strategies that will ensure success and anxiety reduction during the process. The Colombo Bogotá offers a variety of language assessment opportunities, such as the APTIS, IELTS, and MET. Likewise, learners can make use of our preparation courses to boost their performance while taking a language test. Regarding preparation strategies, Singh, C. et al (2021) provide the following series of ideas:

- a. Cognitive strategies:
 - i. Repetition: re-reading or re-visiting the material in order to make sure understanding takes place.
 - ii. Translating: sometimes, extrapolating the information in the mother tongue helps students make sense out of the ideas presented in the material. This strategy, although helpful, must be handled with care, since overusing it may hinder students' actual potential to perform well in exams.
- b. Metacognitive strategies:
 - i. Relating to personal life: exercises that have students think, reflect, and complete answers based on their own beliefs promote learner's independence and help develop analysis skills. This strategy has a crucial role in the writing section of language assessment tests.
 - ii. Self-questioning: when given information, learners must be cautious about interpreting it literally. Sometimes, wondering 'does X word really mean this, or can it have a different interpretation?' guides learners to better grasp the ideas of listening, conversations, readings, and instructions.

- iii. Using prior knowledge: allowing learners to resort to their own prior ideas aids them in making connections, thus fostering understandings and analysis. Activating prior knowledge makes room for task completion and helps reduce anxiety in learners.
- c. Compensation strategies:
 - i. Guessing is the most common compensation strategy. Compensation strategies are those the learner uses to fill a hole in the information. When guessing, students need to keep attentive to coherence and register in order to find sensible answers.
- d. Affective strategies:
 - i. Expressions and emotions: when facing a test, students will experience different emotions such as anxiety, nervousness, relaxation, stress, etc. Hence the need to work on self-regulation and self-management to make use of the emotions while not letting them affect performance.

10. Teacher mentorship, coaching, professional development

The Colombo Bogotá has developed a series of initiatives to favor professional growth by reinforcing teaching and language skills among all teachers at the institution. Teachers have the opportunity to take part in conversation clubs, coach other teachers, and guide them through the processes of the Colombo. While these ideas have the intention of promoting a better performance academically and professionally, a side effect of these ideas is the synergy that stems from these interactions. At the Colombo we know that we are a community, and as such, creating spaces for professional, academic, and personal growth through cooperation, collaboration, and togetherness is key.



The Rolling Ruanas closing ABLA ELT with a little taste of our rich cultural diversity.



Bridging the gap between Latin American cultures

By Carolina Vega - Supervisor

The Association of Binational Centers of Latin America, ABLA, brought to Bogotá a major academic event in the ELT setting: Beyond New Challenges: Binational Centers and their Role in Transforming Language Teaching in Latin America; an experience that took place at Centro Colombo Americano, Bogotá, Downtown Branch in a hybrid version for the very first time.

The past three years have been crucial for the development of new regulations, techniques, strategies, and methodologies that emerged after the forced adaptation we all had to make to the Covid 19 pandemic. Therefore, this conference hosted speakers from a great variety of settings who joined to illustrate the opportunities for growth that have emerged along with social-emotional learning, hybrid and phygital educational spaces, the creation of communities of practice, and the opportunities for professional development. Not only did international keynoters have the chance to put forward sensitive and academic subjects, but also, teachers and leaders of our very own Colombo contributed to the scope of knowledge based on

research and studies they have conducted. Artificial intelligence, inclusion, diversity in the EFL setting, empathy, sustainability, assessment, and some other areas connected to global skills were among the topics of discussion.

In addition, each session got teachers, leaders, coordinators, administrators, publishing houses and policy makers from different binational centers together. They could socialize and share visions that their very own cultures have shaped. Finding cultural alignments among people nurtured the discussions around professional development since each attendee had the opportunity to learn how to make adaptations to the curriculum from colleagues.

Being the Centro Colombo Americano - Bogotá an exemplary and inspirational institution for other centers, there were many areas of interest worth revisiting. All the members of our community can already watch the recordings of all the plenary sessions and learn from the best educational practices to pursue the wellbeing of their students, teachers and education in general.

Sala Tairona Plenaries:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUY_WUimgW8

1. Reimagining our Relationships with the Environment by Mary Scholl
2. Lost and Found: What do your learners REALLY need to learn? By Sarah Hillyard
3. By Ainsworth.

Library plenaries:

https://youtube.com/live/QNjZW_B4CHA?feature=share

1. Harnessing Empathy in a Rapidly Changing World by Christopher O'Shaughnessy
2. Assessment Beyond Testing: celebrating students' achievements through social and emotional development by Monica Rodriguez Salvo.

We have a new mediator!

Meet Jeisson Fabián Amaya Torres, our new EducationUSA mediator



About Me:

Greetings! My name is Fabian Amaya, and I am an enthusiastic and experienced language educator specializing in the instruction of English as a second language. With a Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages from Universidad de la Salle, Colombia, and a master's degree in advanced English Studies, Languages, and Cultures in Contact from Universidad de Salamanca, Spain, I possess a strong academic background. Throughout my career, I have gained practical teaching expertise in various educational settings, including schools, universities, bilingual environments, and I have to mention that this

is not my first time at the Colombo. I was a KTP teacher a few years ago. Furthermore, I have extensive experience in training fellow teachers in methodology, pedagogy, bilingual education, gamification, flipped learning, and fostering learner autonomy.

As an English teacher, I have designed and implemented innovative learning and teaching strategies for various proficiency levels, catering to both face-to-face and online environments. Additionally, I have worked as an Academic Consultant, offering pedagogical support, collaborating closely with teachers, and implementing didactic strategies within the teaching profession. I have also conducted workshops on English language teaching methodologies such as PBL, CBL, TBL, CLIL, EMI, PrBL, Bilingualism, and provided class observations and constructive feedback for teachers.

Beyond the professional realm, I lead an active lifestyle and enjoy engaging in sport activities such as swimming, CrossFit, and regular gym workouts. I find solace and tranquility in the countryside and by the beach, where I can truly unwind and disconnect from the daily bustle. Traveling and immersing myself in different cultures and communities is a passion of mine. The exposure to diverse perspectives has provided me with meaningful learning experiences, reinforcing the importance of understanding and embracing different cultures.

My Role at Colombo:

In my role as a mediator, I will be actively involved in developing fully tailored English mediation sessions aimed at promoting EducationUSA and International Exams among Colombo students and teachers. These sessions cover a wide range of engaging topics, including “Why is Volunteerism an Important American Value?” and “Debunking Stereotypes” to “Living in a Multicultural Place”, among others. I encourage you to explore these diverse topics and book mediation sessions, available for both face-to-face and virtual classes. These sessions will provide your students with a unique opportunity to learn, discuss, analyze, develop critical thinking skills, and gain a fresh perspective on the world. Importantly, they will realize that studying in the USA is an attainable and realistic aspiration, rather than an impossible dream.

I look forward to collaborating with you and your students, fostering a rich learning environment that expands horizons and encourages personal growth.



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