

From theory to Practice

PD: Set your Path for Growing

By **Danny Torres** - Teacher

"The flower that blooms in adversity is the most rare and beautiful of them all."

Mulan

As EFL teachers, we must be on top of our teaching game to make sure both skills and knowledge remain at their best as our endeavors are quite demanding and always updating. Plus, EFL influencers are gaining international recognition in the media, as they are seen as guides to anyone who is interested in learning English at any location and time. Therefore, we must seek opportunities for learning and improving in areas such as innovative teaching, researching, supervising, volunteering, academic writing, and media presence, among others.

On the one hand, a rising concern among fellow teachers is the demand to show evidence and constant efforts apart from the work done by institutions around the globe. On the other hand, teachers themselves, teachers' trainers, administrators, and policymakers are realizing that PD goes beyond courses, as it entails situated conditions for improvement for the sake of the general, professional, and personal well-being of educators (Li, 2022). Teachers are still the cornerstone of education and, although the feeling of not moving forward or not doing it fast enough can be quite frustrating, it is a fact that everyone has their own pace, and all professionals are complex and different. It is therefore unfair to compare individual professional growth.



The following advice is meant to be shared with those who have felt stuck from time to time and are trying their best to figure out the best way to take action and control their career paths.

Put Yourself First

Both your pupils and peers need you to be physically healthy and mentally strong. Even though it is quite easy to find lots of stress and anxiety within this field, one must count on a good number of strategies to prevent burnout from happening. EFL environments are not strangers to stressful situations, and burnout occurs as a consequence of us trying to enhance our teaching, skills, and duties (Chang, 2022). Burnout is a reality, and it takes place whenever we overwork, but do not work smartly. With time, experienced teachers get to discover on their own that there is no point in having an unhealthy work-life relationship.

One learns to enjoy covering all the checks without neglecting oneself. Self-efficacy is the set of skills, strategies, and knowledge for us to do the best of our time and work. Bandura suggests being self-aware of how our behaviors affect our performance and motivation by using physical and cognitive resources to make the best of our time (Bandura, et al Chang 2022). By establishing consistent routines and managing time proficiently, we are likely to avoid the feeling that our life has become our job. In fact, we need to visualize ourselves as multi-talented professionals who need to give their best. This does not mean that well-being strategies have to do with basic self-care. Having a good diet, exercising, reading, and having a good set of pastimes not only will make you a better human being but also, a more interesting teacher, someone who's indeed inspirational and a natural leader.

“...writing is such a great exercise to make sense of your deepest thoughts, whether it is a journal, paragraph, or article; feel free to materialize what you think, feel, and have done to make a better world for your fellow English teachers.”

New educational trends, changing teaching materials, and even AI are always on the horizon requiring us to adapt. Do not read because you are asked to, but develop this enlightening habit to get you on top of what is going on around the world. Find what appeals to you the most. I personally recommend Edutopia or Frontiers if you happen to be short of time and are looking for brief, yet edifying and current articles or information. Why not read any interesting article in one of our local magazines: HOW, Profile, Ikala, or Colombian Applied Linguistics. In the same vein, writing is such a great exercise to make sense of your deepest thoughts, whether it is a journal, paragraph, or article; feel free to materialize what you think, feel, and have done to make a better world for your fellow English teachers. Last but not least, do not be afraid of spreading the word. Sometimes inspiration comes from unexpected places and people, and you will never know the power of your reach. By simply having a quick word with your colleagues or a chit-chat while having coffee, brainstorming naturally happens, and great ideas are supposed to be discussed and deconstructed. Just like bees pollinate by traveling, we end up leaving many seeds that will flower in mysterious ways.



Research

Sadly, research is not paid for in most common local and national teaching settings. Still, do not let that stop you. Learn on the go and have fun. Never before did we have such a good number of resources and workmates that can enlighten the way. The best part of studying humanities is that there is no set nor perfect formula. Even though some of our production may be a little undervalued by others, we do resort to the scientific method to validate knowledge and abilities. We are natural observers and researchers; it is just a matter of documenting our findings, and even if it is not your thing, take the chance once in a lifetime - What is there to lose? On the contrary, even if you are surprised by the results you obtain, do not overthink it or procrastinate. Plus, you will be next touring academic events like ABLA or ASOCOPI and serve as an inspiration to other teachers who are always taking notes on how to learn, teach, perceive, research, report, publish, design, etc.

Take a Course

Call it peer or social pressure, most teachers end up taking a master's degree and even becoming doctors in particular areas of knowledge. I call it the need to become better and more sophisticated, thus a path worth respecting and following. However, education expectations and requirements are reshaping and there is a great offer to address your educational wants and needs. By implementing the knowledge acquired from taking a course, you can have a great impact on your career and community. If you have the chance to choose what course to take in your institution, pick what makes you happier and wiser. If you do not, milk it out one way or another. Research conducted in CCA Manizales showed that on the bright side, PD courses have a direct effect on teaching and teachers perceived this training as positive and beneficial to their students. Although there seem to be gaps from theory to practice, studies like this show that there are chances for a deeper



reflective approach (Novozhenina & López, 2018). In the case that you decide to educate yourself on your own, reach institutions you always wanted to add to your CV, go overseas, or apply for scholarships. I am permanently amazed by coworkers who end up taking their careers to the next level. Studying is an investment of time, money, and energy, so assess and find chances for equivalent retribution.

To Volunteer or not Volunteer?

Volunteering is a potential field for exploration, growth, and the transference of your hard and soft skills into formal and non-formal settings. In addition to this, it is argued that it represents opportunities to acquire new abilities and an asset for employability (Giancaspro and Manuti, 2023). Volunteering is applauded when great causes are supported. Volunteering means to let go, and being aware that you will not get any income out of it; therefore, do it only if you find it fulfilling. Nothing is for free, that is a life rule of thumb. The more time and heart you put into a project, the more you need to evaluate the likelihood it offers for others to see your talent, work, and potential.

There is nothing wrong with putting yourself on the spot after an act of selflessness. Make sure you get certified by well-known institutions and show it off. Every hour

of work means one more of planning, assessing, and stressing either pre- or post-class; so, think twice before working for free or carrying out activities that an institution can cost on their own. Instead, find chances to climb the corporate ladder. Be in charge of your narrative and find a happy ending. Otherwise, the experience you have will taste bittersweet.

Media

Now there are thousands of teachers doing their thing on Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. If you feel you have the right attitude, as well as the time and willingness to put your foot to it, do not think twice. Being popular is not easy. If you already are, you just need to let your light shine through. If you are just about to get it started, adjust your expectations, but do not hesitate. Certainly, the media will eventually demand some of your time, data, and devices, so make sure you are happy with the content you are creating. Find your niche and community. Appreciate being followed just by friends and family, learn not to care if your numbers are not the best, and think of it as an opportunity to be the teacher you want to be, as if no one were watching. The reason is, no one is paying you, or supervising you. If you are good enough already, learn how to monetize and collaborate. Collabs and mentions have to be reciprocal and consented, and take care of your personal image and even your voice because everyone is watching. Learn how to copyright and protect your branding, the more unique and rarer you are, the bigger the presence and persona.

Conclusion

If you are going through a rough year, remember you are not alone. Your students will always know your classes rock. Nobody said teaching was easy. Do not count yourself out of the game because of your age, background, or personal challenges. No one is perfect, and everyone is so obsessed with themselves. So, put your money and

time into yourself. Once you discover the potential of permanent PD, you will impact positively your community, and as a consequence:

“Teachers prioritize programs that involve educators and their cultural and social realities. Consequently, PD programs should dialogue with the diverse contexts teachers live and be aligned with their needs and expectations. In a similar fashion, certain authors have asserted that when PD programs are based on teachers’ needs, skills, and experiences, there is a high possibility to have a positive impact in the professional life of educators, their pedagogical practices, and their students”. (Barrientos-Moncada, Carvajal-Castaño & Aristizabal, 2023).



What's Hot in ELT?

Discussing and Redefining Empathy

By **Pilar Bravo** - Leader of Academic Innovation & Curricula



about all of them at once, but then, it would be a pretty extensive paper. That is why we have decided to approach the most salient ones gradually. Let's start with empathy in this issue.

What is and isn't empathy?



The World Economic Forum, in its 2023 Future of Jobs report (The Future of Jobs Report 2023, 2023) ranked empathy and active listening in the eighth place, on the list of core skills for the workforce. This, only after other important skills such as analytical thinking, creative thinking, resilience, etc.:



The top 10 core skills show a very interesting balance between soft and hard skills, all necessary to succeed individually or with others, in today and tomorrow's job market. This ranking also shows a sensible combination among cognitive skills such as analytical or creative thinking; technology

skills such as tech literacy; self-efficacy such as resilience; management, such as quality control; and, last, but not least, key skills to work with others, such as leadership and empathy. This goes to reconfirm that education, and English language teaching is not the exception, cannot just aim at helping learners develop only one type of skills, isolated from other very important ones they will need not just at work, but to live a balanced life, in general.

So, in order to foster a kind of English Language competence that provides our learners of all ages and backgrounds with better opportunities, we are also compelled to integrate activities, practices, reflections and resources that facilitate the development of a variety of skills and competences. For instance, a lot has been said about soft skills such as empathy. But do we really understand their importance? In a nutshell, soft skills help learners develop essential interpersonal, emotional, communication, and problem-solving abilities that are crucial for academic success, future careers, wellbeing, and overall personal growth. All of them are key in our comprehensive development, and we wish we could write

According to Brené Brown, renowned American research professor, author, public speaker and an expert in the topic, empathy is closely related to the concepts of connection, vulnerability, and shame. She defines **connection** as our ability to forge meaningful, authentic relationships with others. It's the essence of human experience and what breathes meaning and purpose to our lives, as social and emotional beings. Now, connection can also be considered a continuum and on one extreme of that continuum we can find empathy, which is what moves us towards deep, meaningful relationships (Brown, 2017).

But what is on the other extreme? After decades of research at the University of Arizona, she has found that shame is what hinders strong and healthy relationships that are absolutely necessary for the wellbeing of humans. And why is that? Well, there is where we can find **vulnerability**. Most likely, we think vulnerability sounds like a condition with a negative connotation. And

What else is News?

New art exhibition

ENTRE HILOS

Much more than Sewing, Unraveling Artistic Narratives

By Oscar Pardo
Cultural Mediator



How do we weave stories? How do we create social fabric? What kind of thread binds us together?

Entre Hilos brings 34 artists together, who, through thread, needle, and fabric, tell intimate and powerful stories that explore memory and materiality. It will be on display until January 20th, 2024, Downtown, and will be offered both as an open-to-all experience, as well as a cultural mediation!

With **thread** as its primary theme, **Entre Hilos** aims to view this material as an element that builds structures through the art of joining, interweaving, and knitting. It also brings together artists from different generations, who, through their works, show the constant dialogue they have with experimentation and tradition. They reveal their search for their own languages, created from narratives that spin ideas, thoughts, and concerns, typical of their artistic processes.

Entre Hilos arises from a curatorial work that invites us to think about the possibilities offered by a traditional material to the artistic field. An expanded view of thread as a concept and materiality, constantly prompts us to ask ourselves: What is told between threads?

that's because culture and social media has made us look at it with shame. We see it as a weakness, as a risk, a disadvantage, and a barrier, even, for growth. Therefore, we have all thought, at some point, vulnerability is something we need to avoid, hide or rather, disguise with fake appearances.

Brown emphasizes that empathy is about recognizing and validating the emotions of others, which fosters deeper connections and enhances relationships.

However, Dr. Brown has redefined vulnerability as the willingness to show up and be seen, even when there are no guarantees. It's about embracing uncertainty, taking emotional risks, and allowing yourself to be authentic and open, even when it's uncomfortable or scary (Brown, 2021). It's about talking and showing not only our strengths, but also, our failures, pain, or disadvantages. Her research emphasizes that vulnerability is not a sign of weakness, but rather a source of strength and connection. It's the foundation for meaningful relationships, creativity, and personal growth because it allows us to engage with life wholeheartedly and authentically. When you practice it, you show others you are also human, you have gone through similar paths and struggles, and they may also feel open to you, find comfort, and strengthen the connection.

Some other interesting findings in Dr. Brown's research on shame and its effect on empathy are: 1. We have all felt it. 2. No one wants to talk about it. 3. The less we talk about it, the more power we give to it (Brown, 2017). So, the problem is not vulnerability, but shame. Sooner or later, we will have to face all kinds of struggles.

However, the attitude we face them with, whether by relying on others' empathy and sharing our vulnerability or by feeling shame because sharing weakness may cause judgement and disconnection, will make all the difference; not only for us, but in our culture.

Now we are ready to understand the concept of empathy. More than simply stepping into other people's shoes, empathy is being vulnerable with others in their own vulnerability (Brown, 2018). It highly differs from sympathy, which means feeling sorry for other people while also showing them you are or have been in a much better place than they are now. Sympathy only creates more disconnection and harm. Empathy involves being present, nonjudgmental, and genuinely caring about someone's emotional experience. Brown emphasizes that empathy is about recognizing and validating the emotions of others, which fosters deeper connections and enhances relationships (Brown, 2021).

In summary, Dr. Brené Brown redefines vulnerability as a source of strength, resilience, and connection rather than weakness. Acknowledging the importance of embracing uncertainty and showing one's authentic self, we need to understand how empathy goes beyond sympathy, fostering deeper connections and enhancing genuine relationships.

The invitation is to recognize the significance of empathy and vulnerability as critical components of personal growth, academic success, and thriving in the ever-changing job market. As we navigate the complex mechanics of human interactions, empathy stands out as a fundamental skill that can lead to a more joyful and fulfilling life journey.

Empathy doesn't require that we have the exact same experiences as the person sharing their story with us... Empathy is connecting with the emotion that someone is experiencing, not the event or the circumstance.

- Brené Brown -

What else is News?



By **Alejandro Ramirez**,
Makers Mediator

(Article enhanced with ChatGPT)



Elevate your creative spirit, ignite your inventive spark, and let your imagination run wild at the unmissable Maker Week, proudly sponsored by the United States Embassy! This exceptional event is not just a gathering; it's a

dynamic celebration of innovation, invention, and limitless possibilities. Open to students of all ages at the Colombo, the Maker Week brings together a diverse community of tech enthusiasts, curious tinkerers, brilliant engineers, and skilled craftspeople.

At the heart of the Maker Week lies the spirit of innovation and experimentation, embracing the core principles of STEAM education (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics). But it doesn't stop there; it's also an incredible opportunity for students to hone their English language skills, making it a truly multifaceted experience.

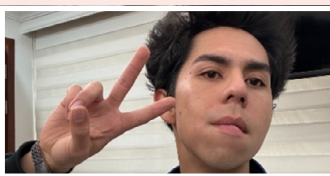
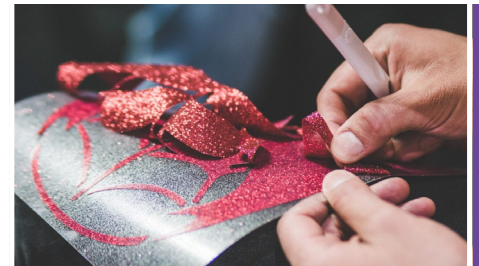
In this exciting edition of Maker Week, we're diving into the realm of entrepreneurship. We'll show you how to turn your creative ideas into thriving businesses, with a special focus on the remarkable sublimation technique. Unleash your inner entrepreneur as you learn the ins and outs of launching and growing your venture. Our experts will guide you through the entire process, from conception to execution, offering valuable insights, hands-on experience, and the chance to network with like-minded individuals.

In addition to the entrepreneurship workshop, Maker Week offers an array of activities that will inspire, educate, and entertain participants

throughout the week. Dive into hands-on workshops where you can build, code, and create using cutting-edge technology. Explore art and design studios, where your artistic visions can take shape. Engage in collaborative projects that encourage teamwork, problem-solving, and out-of-the-box thinking. Join thought-provoking discussions, listen to inspiring talks by industry leaders, and witness awe-inspiring demonstrations of emerging technologies.

Don't miss this opportunity to be a part of a transformative experience that can shape your future. The Maker Week is not just an event; it's a launchpad for your creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurial dreams. Join us, and together, let's make, create, and inspire!

More information about the Maker Week agenda and how to participate coming soon!



We Have a New Library Mediator!

Manuel José Martínez Carvajal

Every time I arrived home from school, I immediately started to read my favorite stories. Books have accompanied me in all the stages of my life and have been the most engaging way to spend my time. Because of this, stories, characters, places, and moments have had a big impact in my life and have determined one of my biggest passions in life.

The pandemic came, and many doors opened for me. Academic publications of essays and fiction publications of tales gave me the opportunity to start to be recognized in circles of reading and writing in Bogotá and in Boyacá. Additionally, in my hometown, Chiquinquirá,

in Boyacá, I created a reading club in which people gather, read a tale or a book fragment and discuss it. All these processes led me to the publication of my first book by the hand of Volar Editorial in 2022, which is a science fiction anthology. By this time, I was fully convinced that books, reading, and writing are my biggest passions in life.

On the other hand, as I come from a family in which most of my relatives are teachers or are involved in academic roles, teaching has been in my veins. That is why I enrolled to study English Philology at National University, and to continue with my professional development, in 2022, I enrolled as a practitioner at Centro Colombo Americano. During the time I was

a practitioner and a KTP, Adults weekend and SED program teacher, all my knowledge was related with promoting the reading in my students, and in making them feel that in books, there are a bunch of stories, perspectives and ways to see the world. With all of this, my classes gave me the opportunity to build a passion for and become more committed to teaching, especially in relation to books, reading and writing processes.

As your new mediator, I'm excited to introduce fresh and diverse perspectives that will help your students discover a world of possibilities within books and the library. I look forward to collaborating with all of you!

Stay tuned so you can have more information about my new mediations.

Anything you need, you can contact me:

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Have a good one!

New Resources from your Library

By **Pedro Lutz** - Director of Interinstitutional Projects and Libraries

We are very excited to share with you our latest acquisitions of material just for teachers. From “TESOL Press”, we have begun acquiring all titles of the series “English Language Teacher Development”. For this month we recommend to you the first 3 titles:



Motivation in the Language Classroom

Willy A. Renandya

<https://reddecolombos.overdrive.com/media/6120385>

Teaching English as an International Language

Ali Fuad Selvi

<https://reddecolombos.overdrive.com/media/6120417>

Teaching English for Academic Purposes

Ilka Kostka

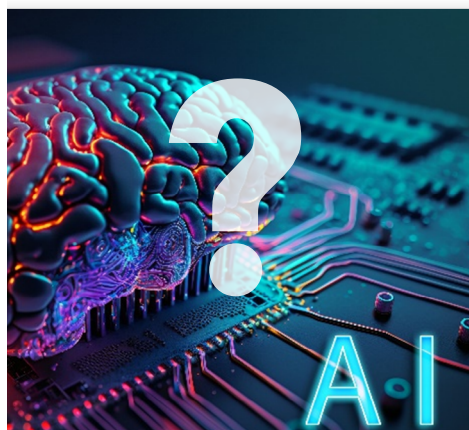
<https://reddecolombos.overdrive.com/media/6120418>

You can check them out here:

<https://shorturl.at/bLV56>

English has evolved into a universal phenomenon, sparking a crucial discussion among English language educators globally concerning the pedagogy of English as an International Language (EIL). The series of books “Teaching English as an International Language” covers this significant moment in the history of English language instruction. It offers an easily understandable overview

of EIL besides an indispensable dialogue concerning EIL, which involves practical applications in teaching methods, materials, culture, identity, and curriculum development. Additionally, it includes reflective questions to guide teachers in their methods to their contexts.



Why do we Need Artificial Intelligence?

How will Artificial Intelligence transform the future of language teaching?

How will it change the way we teach and assess our learners?

How will it impact your life and career?

How can you handle the challenges and opportunities?

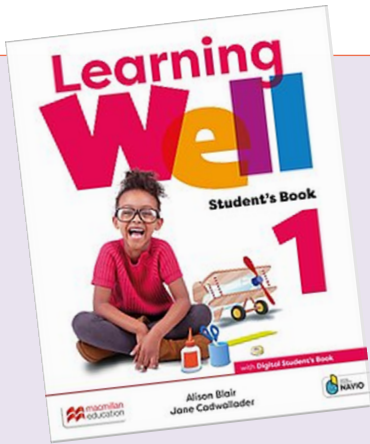
Answer all these questions and more with this OUP podcast Talking ELT – the easiest place to learn about the big issues in language teaching!

<https://shorturl.at/FJQ02>

What else is News?

New Curricular Projects Coming Soon!

By **Pilar Bravo** - Leader of Academic Innovation & Curricula



Redesign of the curriculum for K courses

We started the redesign of the K courses last September. After a validation on some of our KA1.4, KA1.5 and KA1.6 levels with standardized tests, we found our youngest learners could achieve the A1 level after 4 courses instead of 6. So, next year, we will launch a brand-new program for YLs made up of 4 courses, a new series called Learning Well by Macmillan, brand new curriculum, exciting projects, and a lot more.

The curricular work team is led by Julieth Figueredo and strongly supported by Brayan Urueña, Carlos Ortiz and Nury Rojas. The pilot is expected to be run in our end-of-the-year vacation course and officially launched in the First-Day Meeting in January!

Design of the training program for Social Responsibility

Astrid Cruz, Curricular Design AS and Gissel Espitia, Social Responsibility and Student Affairs Coordinator have been working on creating a very practical, interactive and super thorough training program for teachers who join will social responsibility initiatives such as CHOP, the MLK scholarship, the Nancy Kotal de Cortés scholarship, English to Fly or Access. It will be piloted and launched soon!



Business Talks

Business Talks is a new product for Businesspeople. It's a conversation club that aims at helping professionals with a B2 and C1 levels of English improve their communicative competence while also developing skills such as leadership, networking, negotiation, persuasion, constructive feedback, among others. We hope to pilot it soon and also, design a similar version for lower levels. For more info, [click here](#)

Makers Package

The first part of the pilot for this product was completed during the recess week, recently. It's a modular series of workshops for YLs, in which they can learn how to sublimate on mugs and do 3D printing. But also, they will learn how to create their own designs, trigger their creativity, do teamwork, make decisions, and solve problems. All, while also practicing their English, of course. Our pilot kids loved their outcomes and can't wait to participate in the other two projects coming soon: fabric print and videogame design with Scratch.





English for Professionals

A whole new program designed exclusively for working professionals is in the making! Our innovative product is tailor-made to provide a dynamic platform for adult learners seeking to master English through engaging conversations, hands-on projects, real-world materials, and skill-building exercises all adapted for the professional context.

Revamping Semi-intensive

Our Semi-intensive program is currently undergoing an extensive needs analysis, encompassing level validation via standardized tests, conducting focus groups involving students and teachers, dropout analysis, surveys, and curriculum evaluation. While a few of these research activities are still in progress, we are in the process of creating a proposal to enrich the program. Overall, it has been a successful product, but we have identified some opportunities for improvement that are geared towards enhancing its effectiveness for both students and teachers.



Entrepreneurship Accelerator Bootcamp

Last, but not least, learning about topics such as entrepreneurship, financial forecasts, business drivers, business plans, agile methodologies, marketing strategies and a lot more has kept us busy lately. The curricular design team, along with the new Alumni and Skills Building Coordinator, Liliamm Ávila, have been designing and planning the Entrepreneurship Accelerator. This intensive two-week business training and networking bootcamp will take place in March and will be offered to 30 Afro-Colombian entrepreneurs. The US Embassy, as usual, has provided its approval and valuable support through a grant to materialize this social responsibility initiative proposed by Daniel Valderrama, our Alumni and Continuing Education Director. The official invitation to participate in this bootcamp will be released soon!

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