

ELT



Ireland bulletin

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Getting Unstuck

by Marjorie Rosenberg - Plenary Speaker ELT Ireland 5th Annual Conference 2019

As teachers have such demanding schedules, they often don't have time to think about 'what else' they could be doing. It is usually easier to stick to certain routines rather than looking for possibilities to stretch out of one's comfort zone. This talk explored the implications of this by looking at teaching styles, methods people are comfortable with, the fears people have about change and the various hats that teachers are expected to wear. It gave examples of a variety of choices available to ELT professionals both

inside and outside the classroom. The goal of the talk was to provide a basis to work together and come up with ways to 'get unstuck'.



Feeling stuck in the mud? You can dig your way out.

Pic By: PickPik

The idea of looking into possibilities of trying out new ideas and expanding beyond our comfort zones came from a conversation with an adult educator who felt that many people felt stuck and unable to make changes. The basis of the talk was then formed by identifying eight areas where teachers could stretch into and specific ideas in these areas were elicited through crowd-sourcing through ELT social media. This was expanded by adding other ideas and activities which could be implemented in the classroom. Teachers were also encouraged to create a timeline for themselves to see what they have already done in their careers. The final part of the talk gave examples of free resources teachers could use in order to provide them with more ideas for expanding their repertoire. The final message of the plenary was found in a TED talk on trying something new for 30 days and gave tips on what was necessary to take on such a challenge.

Part I - We began by looking at what keeps us from trying out new ideas such as fear of failure, lack of time, opportunity, funds or support, no motivation or simply not knowing where to start. We then went on to look at ideas which could counteract these fears, including using new methods, teaching new subjects, implementing new technology, taking part in continuing professional development (CPD), stretching out of our preferred learning styles, working with colleagues, being part of a personal learning network (PLN), and moving into a new area of ELT. The twenty-four global contributors came from a total of twenty-two different countries.

Their different perspectives on how they themselves had taken on new

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ideas and challenges was meant to inspire others as well as give them the specific examples they had tried. These quotes were then followed up by a list of activities which have proven to work in the classroom.

Working on a personal timeline is another way to help teachers reflect on what they have already accomplished. In doing this myself, I realised how my teaching career has changed over the years and how new challenges and opportunities consistently appeared. When participants take the time to do their own timelines and reflect on the steps they have already taken, this can prove in black and white which accomplishments someone has already achieved.

It is also important to know what options are available for teachers to use. As we continue ourselves to grow and change, we discover more and more possibilities in this multi-faceted field. As mentioned earlier, a number of resources were then demonstrated showing the listeners the ease in which they can add to their repertoire without a great deal of effort on their part.

Part II

The plenary started off by having a closer look at new methods that can be used. Colleagues suggested ideas such as using riddles found in literature, having students create revision material for each other, using theatre techniques with unplugged teaching and implementing ideas from Total Physical Response (TPR) with adults. Other ideas for the classroom included making use of cooperative learning groups which set up interdependent relationships for those in them, project work, music and art or learner diaries. We then moved on to the idea of teaching new subjects. Contributions included negotiating content with specialised groups of students or teaching a group online which needed specific material which the teacher prepared in advance and gave feedback on afterwards.

“Other suggestions included asking colleagues for ideas that work, observing others’ classes, or asking those teaching another subject what they do in the classroom and exchanging ideas with them.”

Other possibilities included teaching another subject in English, expanding into areas that a teacher is knowledgeable in, inviting an expert to the class or finding information on specific topics which could trigger discussions. Ideas suggested for new technology were using 'Prezi' for presentations, or 'Bitstrips' with young learners, making use of wikis or an iPad with apps for teaching pronunciation. Additional activities were online learning platforms, videos from the internet, mobile phones for interaction in the classroom or discussing technology around us. The ideas for CPD were also varied. A number of colleagues have done extra qualifications such as a CertIBET (Certificate in International Business English Training), a DipTESOL (Licentiate of Trinity College London Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) or the TKT (Teaching Knowledge Test) and the TTC (Train the Trainer) courses as well as going back to university for advanced degrees. Others commented that CPD for them included writing and reading blogs, watching webinars, attending conferences and chatting with colleagues.

The ideas offered included setting up training sessions or ‘swap shops’ with colleagues to exchange ideas, planning courses with colleagues, as well as attending online training sessions, conferences and webinars. Colleagues had comments as well about ideas for stretching out of their preferred learning styles. Several said they were not very kinaesthetic so began doing more of those activities with their students and learning themselves to become more hands-on. More

suggestions included trying to teach in a different way than we usually do, specifically adding in listening activities or pictures or movement and trying out activities we have never done before.

In asking about colleagues, educators mentioned that they have been training colleagues themselves in specialised fields or in English or have helped to organise local workshops in which colleagues present on different topics. Other suggestions included asking colleagues for ideas that work, observing others' classes, or asking those teaching another subject what they do in the classroom and exchanging ideas with them. The concept of a personal learning network (PLN) was new to a number of people and they enjoyed hearing that others stay in touch with people from courses they have done on both social and professional levels and that conferences are a good place to make contacts.

It was suggested that people consider joining online groups of teachers and contribute to the group, become active in a teacher association or stay in touch with people they meet at professional events. The new area of ELT was one that several have made the change to. This included working as a DOS (Director of Studies), a course coordinator, or a coach. Others have become translators or interpreters, materials writers or editors. Some have begun to develop teacher training courses online or to work with learners with special needs. Other ideas included writing fiction for ELT learners, setting up exchange programmes or starting an ELT video production company. Other suggestions included working with colleagues on curriculum, learning to be an examiner or items writer for exams, or taking the big step of presenting at conferences. The talk then moved on to the timeline mentioned earlier and the value of personal reflection was explained. A number of ideas of what teachers can do wrapped up this part of the plenary and included writing supplementary materials, online materials, curriculum, getting involved in testing, doing teacher training, discovering ideas on the internet, or setting up a PLN.

The specific resources which were used to round off the talk were the 'ELTChat', a discussion group which takes place on Twitter based around a pre-agreed topic, the 'ELTPics', a collection of 27,000 photos by teachers for teachers organised into more than 100 categories, the Map of the Linguistic Landscape (MULL), which includes photos of language people find in public places, the NO Project which provides lesson plans for classroom and trains student ambassadors to raise awareness about the danger of human trafficking, Simple English Videos, a collection of ELT videos used to teach vocabulary, grammar and language functions, and TED talks.

Conclusion

The talk concluded with the saying: 'If you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you have always gotten.' This idea should help teachers to realise that repeating the same routines over and over will give us the same results. Once we begin to look at the other possibilities around us and take the chance to try out something new, we have many more opportunities to grow and learn which can only have positive results on our motivation and the motivation of those we teach.

Resources

<http://eltchat.org/wordpress>

<http://disabled-accessfriendly.com>

https://www.facebook.com/groups/MURbanLL/?ref=br_rs

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/eltpics/albums/>

<https://www.simpleenglishvideos.com/videos/>

<http://thenoproject.org/>

<https://www.ted.com/talks>

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