

How can peer-led training and mentoring support teachers' development?

Transcript



Episode transcript

The transcript highlights words that are classified under different CEFR levels

CEFR B2 words are highlighted in **yellow**.

CEFR C1 words are highlighted in **green**.

CEFR C2 words are highlighted in **blue**.

Further information about the underlined words can be found in the show notes.

Transcript

Introduction and discussion

We'am: Hello and welcome to Teaching English with the British Council – Series Two

Chris: A podcast where we try and provide solutions to some of the key questions being asked to English teachers around the world.

We'am: We are your **hosts** – We'am Hamdan

Chris: and Chris Sowton

In the first part of each episode we hear from a British Council project programme or **publication** about something which is being done to address this issue.

We'am: Across the ten episodes of Series Two we'll hear from Teachers, Trainers and Researchers in a wide range of **contexts**.... including.... Ukraine, Romania, Egypt and the **United Kingdom**.

Chris: In the second part a leading English expert and **practitioner** will provide **practical** solutions which you can immediately **try out** wherever you work.

We'am: Each episode of Teaching English is accompanied by a full transcript and show notes. These show notes provide **additional** information, a glossary of keywords and links to **relevant** websites.

Sting: This is Episode 7: How can peer-led training and mentoring support teachers' development?

Chris: Hello and welcome to Episode 7 of Teaching English with the British Council in which we **look at** how **peer**-led training and mentoring can support teacher development. We'am, what's your interest and knowledge of this particular area?

We'am: I worked on Teaching for Success programme as a teacher training co-ordinator and in the groups we **gathered**, each group, we had teachers with different experiences. Some of them worked for fifteen years and some of them are novice teachers. So mentorship was great in terms of bringing together all the experiences and making teachers just more confident with what they have and more open to sharing these ideas with other teachers who might be more experienced, and **vice versa** as well.

Chris: Absolutely, and I think you **raise** a really interesting point, which is it can be **beneficial** to the experienced teacher as well as the less experienced teacher. I think sometimes when we talk about these things, it's seen as a one-way street, that it's the experienced trainers or teachers supporting the less experienced but actually it is very much a two-way **process**.

We'am: Yes, sometimes it's harder to work with experienced teachers, but when experienced teachers see that new teachers are trying out new ideas, and trying to cope with the changes and, you know, this age is different and these new teachers are bringing new ideas to the classroom, I think the experienced teachers are more encouraged to try out new things.

Chris: Exactly.

And in our interview this week, we listened to [EVE - Equal Voices in ELT](#) and we welcome Chris, Charlotte and Mariya.

We'am: Welcome to the podcast. First of all, can you please tell us about EVE or Equal Voices in ELT?

Chris: Absolutely. I mean EVE was set up **initially** to address **gender** equity issues in the **context** of international conferences because so many times when you **look at** the poster or the banner for an international conference, there were four nice male faces **staring** at you and it was set up **initially** to try to **confront** that and **engage** with that and now it's also become involved with **the native speaker/ non-native speaker balance** because many of those four male face looking at you were also male **native** speakers. So it's about equity in English language teachers, **specifically** in conferences. The mentoring side works with teacher **associations** around the world. We reach **agreements** with teacher **associations** who have a body of members, some of whom, female members would like to be able to speak, if not at international conferences, at larger national or local conferences, and feel they need some support in terms of preparing their presentations, preparing their talk, those are the mentees. And the **mentors** tend to be **practitioners** with a certain amount of experience in the world of English Language Teaching who have spoken many times themselves at conferences and they provide online one-to-one mentoring, a series of meetings and **rehearsals** and **ultimately**, a very small sort of a mini-conference as it were, at the end for everybody to try a public delivery of what they've done. And before I stop talking, one other newsflash is we are on the 27th of May, **hosting** a conference, which will be open to the public as it were where we're going to ask, give the opportunity for our mentees over the last two or three programmes to deliver something that they're **passionate** about to a conference and we will also have other invited speakers too

Chris: And can I ask, Chris, why did you pivot to the mentoring side of things?

Chris: We've always been **aware** of the **gender balance** and perhaps me speaking about it or blogging about it or putting stuff on Twitter about it, which is fine, it's **awareness** raising. But what I like about the mentoring is that it actually does something, it's actually saying, well, here's a problem, let's **engage** with it. Let's **identify** eight or ten **potential** speakers and let's work with them, and support them so they can go to these conferences. Mentoring works; I think people come out the other end of the **process** thinking: hmm, I can do this.

We'am: Yeah. And one of the important things when there is a relationship between mentor and the mentee is a good rapport between the both of them. So what do you think makes a good mentor mentee relationship?

Chris: It seems to me that mentoring is really a conversation. I mean, that sounds a little bit trite, but it is an exchange. It's very different from training. This is an opportunity for two experienced **professionals**, and most of our mentees, I'm sure Charlotte would agree actually have quite a lot of experience under their belt, but maybe they haven't gone into the conference direction for whatever reason. So it's two **professionals** exchanging ideas, **frankly** and **openly**. You have sometimes to have quite grown-up conversations with your mentee

but to allow those grown-up conversations to happen, there has to be that rapport as We'am says, there has to be that relationship. And I think complete openness at the beginning is very important. One of my mentees, she was very concerned about the level of her English. We had a grown-up conversation I said yeah, maybe your English may not be quite the level of other people, that's fine. That doesn't mean you can't do a workshop or presentation, whatever she wanted to do at a conference, that's fine. So it's creating that safe space I suppose.

Chris: You know, to develop that relationship can be, maybe slightly difficult because it's done 99% of the time online. Do you think sort of the impact of COVID and the pivot and the shift to more digital forms of communication has helped EVE in promoting the mentoring programme?

Chris: I think it probably has because EVE is about egalitarianism. It's about democracy. It's about access. And that's one gift I suppose we've heard from COVID. In an odd way, it's almost easier to create a report online. I don't think it's a challenge. And I think it's actually made life a lot easier in some ways in terms of accessibility. And that's what EVE is about. It's about equal access and equal opportunity.

Chris: Brilliant. And just one final question. A sort of a practical question, really, we have listeners from all different groups and organisations, how can they get involved in EVE if either their teacher association or an experienced teacher or teacher trainer or a less experienced person who wants to be mentored? What are the next steps that they can do?

Chris: If they're an existing Teacher Association, they can contact EVE through the website. If a teacher wants to get involved as a mentee, they should go to Teacher Association in their country, encourage them to contact us. If a practitioner wishes to become a mentor, we are delighted to have new mentors. It's a great process and if you've got a little bit of spare time, and it's really not massively time-consuming, and you've got fairly good internet connection, and you've got some experience the conference presented will be delighted to hear from you.

Chris: Brilliant, thanks so much Chris. Now maybe we can move on to Charlotte and Mariya, a mentor and a mentee. So to find out as it were from the ground, what it's like.

Mariya: My name is Mariya. I've been teaching English as a foreign language for almost 20 years now. I currently work at a state secondary school, and also I teach educational management to postgraduate students.

Charlotte: Similar to Mariya actually I've been teaching English for about twenty years. I've worked in a private language academy, I've also taught secondary here in Spain, and I've done a fair bit of teacher training. So I was thrilled to get involved with the mentoring scheme because although I've presented at the local and national level, I remember feeling absolutely petrified the first time I presented at IATEFL.

We'am: Can you tell us how long have you been working together as mentor and mentee and maybe a little bit about the process?

Charlotte: Sure. I think we worked together over about a three-month period, but we worked quite intensively, and we emailed quite a bit in addition to meeting together

Mariya: We met once a week on Zoom, besides emails, and of course, I worked on my presentation and Charlotte was gradually checking how I progressed and she gave me useful advice on how to improve the presentation process and that's how we functioned.

Chris: So I guess get quite a lot of it is what happened between the Zoom sessions?

Mariya: Well, absolutely, yes, she gave me clear instructions. I was allowed to select my own topic. And she just gave me advice on how to improve my communication skills.

Charlotte: I mean, it was very obvious to me when we started working together that Mariya was **incredibly** expert in this particular area.

Chris: Can I ask, Mariya, why in the first place did you feel you wanted a mentor? What was it that sort of led you down that path?

Mariya: I have been teaching for a long time. I do attend conferences, and sometimes I wished I could speak to those conferences. But what I **lacked** was **courage** and **confidence**.

Chris: And can I ask, Mariya, how did it go on the day when you when you gave your presentation?

Mariya: Well, I definitely was proud of myself. I did spend a lot of time preparing, which is very important for me in my case because I felt very anxious I have to admit, but I followed Charlotte's advice. And that's why in the end, I felt really proud of myself.

Chris: And can I ask, Charlotte, how did you feel as you were watching Marija give her presentation?

Charlotte: well, I was very proud of her but I wasn't in the least surprised because the first day I met her I, you know you can immediately see that this is a very experienced teacher who has a lot to share with her colleagues and to me the, you know, the mentoring relationship it felt very much like a successful **peer collaboration** and we spent quite a lot of time chatting about just what was going on in our classrooms.

We'am: From my understanding, a lot of it can be you know, **transforming** this passive knowledge maybe into a more **practical** knowledge or, you know, more hands-on knowledge. So how can we change this **perception** that the relationship is one way from mentor to mentee?

Marija: I really don't think that it's a one-way relationship because all mentees are different. We have different needs. So I believe that every mentor will also learn something from each and every different mentee. For example, in my case, I've already told you that I really have some **confidence** issues when it comes to giving presentations and I noticed that at the very beginning that Charlotte did not expect that. Of course **eventually**, she helped me **overcome** that.

Charlotte: I think what you've **identified**, wanting to feel more confident about **presenting** is something that very many teachers will feel and I think it's very useful to have **raised** that. And something that also was **apparent** to me in our conversations, Mariya was a feeling that you're in a **network** which is supporting you and encouraging you, because not all teachers have that in their local context. And I think that was a very important part of your preparation and that's something that EVE absolutely offers, both in the individual mentor experience but also as an organisation, it's incredibly welcoming.

Mariya: In my local **community** it is not very **supportive** when it comes to English Language Teachers sharing their knowledge and skills. So becoming part of a group of people that

support each other to share their knowledge and experience is really important.

Charlotte: Yeah, and also going back to Chris's point about accessibility. And also, Chris, what you said about even just the practicalities of making this work. I mean, very many teachers are women, they have families, they may have young children, they might also be caring for an elderly relative. So that would just be like the practical points but early on that we had to identify a time of day when Mariya could actually have some uninterrupted time to think about and focus on her presentation and how she wanted that to go.

Chris: I was also going to ask the words themselves slightly problematic of mentor and mentee in my mind it's a slightly old-fashioned term because it does come with it that sort of power imbalance within those words, which isn't evident in the relationship between the two of you.

Charlotte: Yeah, I think there's definitely something in that. And to me, it felt very much more like working with a colleague.

Chris: Before you met Charlotte, did you have that idea of what a mentor looked like or what what that would be?

Mariya: I was not expecting someone like Charlotte I have to admit. I was expecting an ELT professional, strict. I don't know, I'm really glad I met Charlotte because she was really friendly and helpful. And a real friend.

Charlotte: Yeah, it was just a great pleasure working with Mariya.

We'am: We spoke briefly about the importance of rapport. And Chris mentioned that it's more of a conversation. So in your opinion, what are some of the best ways for building this relationship between a mentor and a mentee?

Mariya: I share Chris' thoughts. I also believe that solid communication is based on active listening and reasonable and respectful responses. So if the mentor and the mentee are willing to listen to each other, and they both engage devotedly, to accomplish the mutual goal, I think that everything's going to be alright.

Chris: One final question. I think the answer is quite clear whether you'd recommend this programme to others?

Charlotte: Absolutely, of course.

Chris: But I suppose more specifically, is maybe what you would say Charlotte, to people who are thinking of potentially becoming mentors what you would say to them, how would you encourage them and Mariya, what you would say to people who are thinking about joining the programme as a mentee, if they're slightly worried, if they're sort of slightly nervous about or apprehensive about it, what you would say to them?

Charlotte: It's not a hugely onerous time commitment. So it's very, very doable even if you're working full time, and it's a very, very enjoyable experience in a well-run and very supportive organisation

Mariya: and yes, I would also definitely recommend this programme to everyone, because in my experience, this mentoring scheme is fully devoted to empowering people, especially women to make their voices be heard.

Chris: Brilliant, thank you so much, Chris, Charlotte and Mariya, it's been fascinating to hear you today.

We'am: I think mentor/mentee could also work as an approach for teacher training and let's say, government schemes to train teachers. In my context, I've seen a lot of training happening from top to down. So if this becomes more like an approach for training, I think teachers can, you know, improve their capacities.

Chris: I think there's a lot of opportunity for that. I think one of the challenges is that so many government systems are still focused on that top-down initial teacher training and also continual teacher training, it's that relationship so I think schemes like the EVE scheme, and the scheme which we'll listen to in the field report are excellent, but they are still quite on the fringes, I think. They're not mainstream at all, so I'm not sure how we make those sorts of schemes more mainstream.

We'am: Yeah. And here they mentioned that the idea started because of gender imbalance. But here it's about females, not getting the opportunity, but also in lower context teaching jobs are, doesn't pay very well, so it's mostly male teachers not engaging in the teaching process more than female teachers and I think it's important that we see this gender imbalance differently in different contexts.

Chris: Yeah, I think it's, I think the mentoring approach can really work with all people I think especially for people who are from more marginalised groups or who are perhaps not as engaged in what they are doing for a whole variety of different reasons. Often, in many contexts around the world, teachers don't get time off for training, they don't get paid for training, they have to do in their own time, sometimes pay their own travel costs, all those sorts of things. So what mentoring I think can offer is a low-cost but really effective method of support and development for teachers.

We'am: Yeah, and the fact that it uses conversation exchange, which is different than training is really great for teachers. And it also teaches them how to have you know, constructive conversation with other peers, how I can improve my skills by just speaking to other professionals in the field. And sometimes we often forget how to use that in a constructive way rather than just minimising the efforts maybe of teachers

Chris: Yeah, and I think that approach can also help in the institution of schools themselves, it can create more balanced relationships within schools. It can normalise those sorts of sharing behaviours and, you know, it might be peer observation within a school, it may be a more democratic way that the school is organised in the staff room, those sorts of things. And I think this kind of training model can certainly help with creating a more positive and democratic school environment as well.

We'am: In this case, Mariya just wanted to improve her presentation skills, but in other cases it might be other things and I think each individual is aware of their weaknesses. One great thing also about mentorship is that you choose and you customise your learning. What do you want to improve? And since you know more about yourself than others, you can choose and then you can build on that.

Chris: People are often afraid to really talk about their issues, their challenges, their problems that they have, because they fear they're going to be judged on it by the inspector and this might link to their career advancement, their levels of pay, their status within the school, all these sorts of things. So I think there's often, they don't feel like very safe spaces, those training zones, I think for people, but with this approach, people are encouraged to, as you say, We'am, focus on things they find challenging, focus on the things they know they

need to improve, it's a much more honest relationship and it will **lead to** much better **outcomes** in the end.

We'am: And if you want to know more about the mentor/mentee programme that Chris mentioned, you can go to evecalendar.wordpress.com (evecalendar dot wordpress dot com)

Chris: and he also mentioned the challenges sometimes faced by non-**native** teachers of English as well and we'll be picking that issue up in Episode Nine.

We'am: For this Field Report, Chris actually went to the Field

Chris: That's right, yeah, so I went to Sibiu in Romania where I had the pleasure of spending half a day with a brilliant group there who share their ideas about teaching and do **peer**-led facilitation once a month.

Excerpt: Yeah, but I don't think that if you're extremely proficient, proficient in English it doesn't make you a good teacher.

Nina: My name is Nicolina. So everyone is calling me Nina for short, and I really enjoy this **nickname** and I'm an English teacher in Sibiu.

Excerpt: And then of course we are going to explore some **strategies** that maybe can help us teach with limited **resources**, which is something that we are all very familiar with, right? Especially in **context**, maybe in **rural** schools, and try to see what, how we can get the best out of these.

Nina: We feel safe. We don't judge. There are no right or wrong answers. So there is a kind of, there has been a developing of friendship between us. Very difficult time and teachers started to be very interested in how to face some challenges, not only with teaching English but in **coping** with daily school life, let's say.

Excerpt: Okay, here are the questions about teaching **resources**: What textbook are you using? It's a really hot topic about textbooks and **resources**. What challenges are you experiencing? What is going well? Do you consider yourself to be teaching in a **context** with limited **resources**? So discussing your book or about these questions, and then share out some thoughts and ideas? Okay, you have 10 minutes for this **task**.

So I'm using two textbooks for sixth and seventh grades, and I found it really interesting. I really liked the **structure** in terms of vocabulary, and grammar and also the exercises that we have, you have a lot of exercises to use.

Because I have two classes A and B, I cannot use the same materials for both classes.

Okay, I started my teaching career in 2002. And from the beginning, I didn't have this textbook in school...

When I started using, using the textbook and I always doing all the exercises. And that was in my second year then I stopped...

I have a problem with not enough textbooks. So I use this solution for groups. And to **assign** them different parts of the lessons. One of them had to read, the other one narrating, writing on the blackboard so they can write it down. And yeah, if I told them exactly from the beginning, what to do to each group.

And I was so glad that the pandemic rules are over and we can pair them and put them into groups.

Bring them closer.

They like to work in groups. Yeah.

Andrea: Hi, my name is Andrea. And I teach in a rural school. So I have been a facilitator in this project since 2018. Well, I think this is a good model because it takes place on a horizontal level, not vertical level because we are all the same. We are not trainers, we are just facilitators and we talk from our experience and especially from our mistakes, so that maybe other people can learn something from them and we share experiences and good practices. And I think that the entire atmosphere is really friendly so that it encourages cooperation as well and we have here a community and I like this.

Excerpt from the session

Nina: And we are lucky enough to have colleagues which are really interesting to improve themselves and to change something in their classes, and only they can do that. I can't, I can't force them.

Excerpt: When we discuss our problems, our difficulties when teaching something, we ask ourselves: how you dealt with that problem?

We'am: I think an increasing number of programmes are starting to use mentorship. The great thing about mentorship is that it increases the confidence of teachers. And it has this smooth way of transitioning teachers from the awareness stage of learning more into the integration stage of learning. I think a lot of teachers have the awareness, maybe the understanding sometimes, but they lack the techniques or the skills on how to engage and integrate, and mentorship proves to be great in that regard.

Chris: Yeah, and what I saw there is that people were very honest in sharing their thoughts and their views with each other, not just their successes, but also their challenges in terms of implementation as well. And I think that sort of mentoring support peer-led model does that, I think one of the participants mentioned talking about the horizontal relationship that they have in the group rather than a sort of vertical top-down relationship. And I think that's a real key to its success.


We'am: Yeah. And I think when you have been teaching for a long time, maybe years, so sometimes it's a bit chaotic, you know, to shake up their beliefs or what they're used to doing in the class. And I think mentorship has this very, you know, smooth way of improving their learning.

Chris: Definitely. And I think that's one of the things that was mentioned as well there, that they said they were facilitators and not trainers. And I think just that choice of language really says a lot about the approach which is used within the sessions as well, it's that we're here to support each other, it's not that I know something and you need to know something, which certainly in a lot of top-down, sometimes government-led training programmes, inspectorate type programmes, can feel to be the case this is very much focused on the developmental aspects of teaching.

We'am: Thank you for listening, and in our next episode, we will talk about what is English for specific purposes and how is it different from General English

Chris: Until then

We'am: Goodbye



**This episode was produced
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