

No More Haunted Hearts Report by Scott Sherriff

Liam Brown, currently enjoying a career break in Syria, was formally a Training and Development Manager for the global Teaching Centre Network. Brown's seminar sought to demonstrate how teachers can enhance job satisfaction and all round happiness in the workplace by focusing on three key areas- (1) Management, (2) Self-Managed Learning and (3) Collaboration.

The title of the seminar itself was taken from the Bob Dylan song 'Bob Dylan's Dream'- "*With haunted hearts through the heat and cold / We never thought we could ever get very old / We thought we could sit forever in fun / Our chances really was a million to one.*" Long careers in ELT do not happen by accident. They require strategic planning. Essentially, Brown claimed, this was a seminar about survival!

Brown recalled the prophetic musings of Adrian Underhill in his article 'Trends in English Language Teaching Today' (MED Magazine, Issue 18, April 2004) in which he predicted that, in the world of ELT, out would go the simple, the certain, the controlled and the established and in would come the complex, the uncertain, the less controlled and the emergent. Underpinning Brown's seminar was Underhill's assertion that there would be a move towards an "increasing valuing of participation in the creation of knowledge" and how this would necessitate tutors and managers to develop a "tolerance, even delight, in working with the fuzzy, the unclear and the unfinished".

Brown believes that Underhill's forecast, certainly from a managerial perspective, has proved to be spot-on. ELT management is now characterised by deadlines, targets and funding issues. In the midst of perpetual evolution and ever changing goalposts there is less focus on development.

(1) Management

Outlining this 'new world', and specifically its impact on management, Brown described the nature of the relationship that must now exist between employers and employees; one that is based on learning. Managers are not just managers of *employees* but managers of *people*. Accordingly, they need to demonstrate a desire to help them improve and learn.

Too often managers consider employees as a cost instead of an asset. Yet the tide is turning. Employees can now be seen as investors and managers regarded as stewards. A bold teacher will treat their provision of labour to an ELT manager as financial capital. If the investment works, they will stay with that organisation and progress. However, if returns are minimal they will seek to increase the growth of that capital by investing elsewhere.

(2) Self-Managed Learning

Teachers talk much of autonomous learning in the context of their students but often fail to apply the same principles to their own practice. Tutors must become better at managing their own development. Brown identified a four stage plan to aid this-

Firstly, individuals need to prepare. They should think about their external environment and the demands that are placed on them. This then ought to be married to an intrinsic diagnosis that determines what development is needed. "What are *my* values?" "What do *I* want?" From this, a more formal professional development plan can be drawn up that defines specific objectives, giving birth to a personalised 'learning contract'.

Secondly, teachers have to identify the resources they possess, either as individuals or as a group, and how best these can be harnessed to meet their objectives.

Thirdly, it will be necessary to collaborate with a learning set that has similar goals or pathways and to work with a mentor or an overseer. This will demand more than co-ordination and co-operation, both of which Brown regards as distinctly different to genuine collaboration.

Brown highlighted the ways in which we collaborate. A problem could be shared in the staff room and, before long, a number of tutors are contributing potential solutions. In a more formal setting, concerns might be raised during monthly meetings. Working parties could be assigned to a specific problem. Beyond this, Brown suggested, we can also choose to go global by posting our query on the internet.

The final stage is to judge the achievements delivered.

(3) Collaboration

Referring to a model developed by Australian company 'Anecdote', Brown described how we operate from four different domains- The Simple, The Complicated, The Complex and The Chaotic. Co-ordination is perfectly adequate to deal with simple issues. Co-operation is demanded to tackle more complicated matters. However, when it comes to the truly complex, only collaboration can deliver results. If we find ourselves in Chaos we must very quickly identify the nature of the problem and which domain we need to operate from in order to solve it!

Ultimately, collaboration requires broad thinking and extending our reach beyond the teams in which we find ourselves to encompass communities with shared domains of interest and establish fruitful communities of practice. As a result, the focus becomes more fixed on the learning and the dissemination of knowledge rather than simply completing the task at hand.

This is defined as the process of developing 'Networks', described by Brown as 'Find' → 'Connect' → 'Create'. It is a journey that starts with an individual's personal interest but ultimately burgeons into one which has wider network benefits, breaking free from the restrictions of traditional teams or even communities where membership is restricted and bounded.

The little acorns that can lead to the formation of networks are varied. It could, as mentioned, begin with a discussion in the staff room. You might upload a document, respond to a forum posting or read, comment or contribute to a blog. There will be something here that even the most burdened of schedules will be able to accommodate.

The individual, Brown asserted, is not enough anymore. Even the team is not enough anymore. In Brown's vision of this 'new world' there is a demand for networks, where individuals are members of communities that can be seen as learning eco-systems which fuse management and learning.

Perhaps Brown's loudest entreaty was that teachers not just be a *part* of a community but actually *facilitate* the creation of communities where possible. 21st century survival for the ELT practitioner, (and the sector as a whole), may well depend on their ability to become proficient and prolific Network builders.