

One on One: Interview with Nicky Hockly

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*Is it possible for a technophobe to become a technophile? **Nicky Hockly**, a well-known educational technologies expert, English language teaching professional and Director of Pedagogy of The Consultants-E, shares her experience of how she has become not just a technophile but a techno expert and also answers various questions related to the need for integrating technology into language teaching in this interview with **Albert P'Rayan**.*

Nicky, many thanks for this great opportunity. You describe yourself as this: "I'm a reformed technophobe, now technophile!" You are not just a technophile but a well known expert in educational technologies. How has been your journey from being a technophobe to becoming a technophile and techno expert?

I've always loved teaching and training, and after about 10 years of being a face-to-face teacher, I started work as the Academic Director of one of the first fully online MA in TEFL programs. I suddenly found myself running this full MA program online, with real students, and no technical training whatsoever. So, I learned about technology the hard way. But I soon discovered that you can also teach effectively online, despite the technical challenges, and I started to really enjoy it! I don't think I'm a

'techno-expert' though. Everything I know about technology, I've taught myself, and I don't think I'm a particularly 'techy' type of person. I simply learn what I need to know about technology as I go along. I think the most important part is the *teaching*, not the technology. But in my experience, technology can enhance one's teaching, and more importantly, students' learning.

As an educational technology consultant, resource person, ELT materials writer, teacher trainer and plenary speaker for over two decades, you must have tasted successes. Would you like to share one important success story that you think will be useful to the readers of the Journal of ELT (India)?

I attended a teacher training conference in Hyderabad a few years ago, and just before that, I spent a week in Rajasthan with my husband. We visited a rural school that had no technology whatsoever, and when the headmaster discovered I was an English teacher, he asked me to teach a class of 12-year-old students on the spot! I couldn't refuse, so I taught the students a few useful English phrases, and got them asking me and each other questions to give them some practice with speaking English. It was clear to me that expecting to have access to technology in a context like this, where many students only come to school

because they are given a midday meal, is totally unrealistic. It reminded me that you don't need to have access to technology to teach effectively. Overall, it was a humbling experience – and I thought the students were wonderful, so keen and engaged!

Do you believe that technology can accelerate learning?

Actually, I've just written a book about this (*Focus on Learning Technologies*, Oxford University Press, 2016). I looked at a lot of the research that has been carried out using learning technologies with primary and secondary school students, particularly in the USA, but also around the world. Essentially, the answer to your question is – it depends. Some technologies (such as blogs), when used judiciously, do seem to improve learning outcomes. However, others (such as interactive whiteboards) don't automatically improve learning.

What impact do educational technologies have on English Language Teaching (ELT) in the twenty-first century?

Although more and more teachers are familiar with educational technologies, they are still not mainstream in many language classrooms around the world. There are teachers who think that it is necessary to have the latest, fanciest gadgets in class to teach effectively, but this is not the case. There is more awareness that things like digital literacies need to form part of the curriculum in primary and secondary schools, and not just in the English language curriculum. So there is more awareness of the opportunities that

educational technologies can provide, but teachers often receive little or no training in how to actually use them effectively in the classroom – and that's assuming they have access to educational technologies in the first place.

Do you think ICT will change the way we teach ESL and EFL in the future?

I think technologies can support communicative language teaching quite well. What I do think needs to change is the 'teacher standing at the front lecturing the students about the language' approach. But we've known that since the early 1970s and the advent of communicative language teaching. I think the most effective use of ICT is integrated into a strong communicative approach, with the teacher acting as facilitator and guide. This does happen in some schools, but is still far from widespread.

How important is digital competence for ESL/EFL teachers?

Digital literacies appear in primary, secondary and tertiary curricula the world over now, so it's important for everyone – teachers and students. Not just for English language teachers, but for everyone to be able to take part fully in our increasingly digital world.

As an educational trainer, how do you motivate teachers who are reluctant to integrate technology into language teaching?

When I run training sessions, I always first try to find out what the teachers'

attitudes to technology are. I've been doing tech training for almost two decades now, and originally many teachers felt very threatened by technology. Many still do, and this is something that needs to be listened to, accepted and respected, if you are to make any progress whatsoever with teachers. So, the first step is for teachers to feel listened to, and then the second step is to start to show them very simple technology tools that they can very easily integrate into what they already do in class. They soon start to see the potential of technology, in my experience. But the important thing is to start small, and to go slowly.

It is said that “if Facebook were a country, it would be the third most populous country in the world”, but it is still considered a taboo by many educationists. Can Facebook be used as a tool to enhance learners’ English language skills?

I always suggest to my students that they ‘like’ public English language sites that they find interesting, so that they are exposed to English outside of class in their own Facebook feeds. I also used Facebook a few years ago with a group of adult elementary level students in which we shared very simple homework assignments, links, and they carried out short language tasks out of class. It worked well with these adults who were already Facebook users, but with younger learners, issues such as privacy, and e-safety need to be addressed if you want to use social networking tools.

How effectively can social media tools

such as Twitter and YouTube be used to help ESL/EFL learners to develop their language skills?

It can be effective for some students, especially those who are already users of the social media tools. For example, watching YouTube videos can provide extra exposure to English, as can following English-speaking celebrities or news feeds on Twitter. But I don't think it's necessarily something for everyone; it depends on the students, their ages, and their interests.

Digital literacy is considered one of the 21st century competencies but still many educators have not realized the potential of digital literacies. Should educators be educated on the importance of digital literacies and on how they can bring digital literacies into the classroom?

Well, having written a book called *Digital Literacies* (with Gavin Dudeney and Mark pegrum), of course, my answer to this question is yes! That's exactly what our book tries to do.

As an EdTech professional, what challenges do you face?

Hmmm, none that I can think of! Except perhaps occasional resistance from teachers – but I find that once they start using simple technologies with their students, they soon come around.

What is your role as a technology consultant with the Cambridge University Press?

I'm part of a group of Consultants for the

Cambridge English Teacher platform. I have some videos and articles about integrating educational technologies into teaching on their website, and I also run webinars for them a couple of times a year.

You cofounded the company Consultants-E with Gavin Dudeney in 2003. Tell us about the company and its work.

We do three main things at The Consultants-E. We run fully online teacher training courses for language teachers interested in learning about how to use educational technologies more effectively. Some of our courses are aimed at classroom teachers, and others are for teachers who want to learn to teach English online. We offer a couple of scholarships each year, that your readers may be interested in (see <http://www.theconsultants-e.com/trainingonline/scholarshipsintroduction.php>).

We also offer face-to-face training, and virtual training for institutions (see <http://www.theconsultants-e.com/trainingf2f/>).

And finally, we offer consultancy services to educational institutions such as universities, language schools, publishers, and organisations like the British Council. Our focus is on helping these institutions integrate technologies and to develop strategic plans that ensure long-term and effective deployment of technologies. We've worked with quite a few well-known institutions over the years! (see our portfolio <http://www.theconsultants-e.com/consultancy/clientsandprojects.php>).

About your long association and collaboration with Gavin Dudeney, a well known educational technology consultant and a past coordinator of the IATEFL Learning Technologies Special Interest Group.

Gavin and I met while we were both working at Netlanguages, one of the first online English language schools, which was set up in 1996. Gavin was on the technical development team, and I was on the online materials writing team. We became friends, and realised that we had a good range of skills between us, with his more 'techie' background, and my more 'teachy' background, so we set up The Consultants-E together in 2003. And we've both been involved in the IATEFL Learning Technologies Special Interest Group – Gavin was the coordinator about 10 years before I was!

How important is the Society of Authors ELT Writing Award that you won for the book Digital Literacies in 2014?

We were of course delighted to get the award. Digital literacies is an often neglected area in English language teaching, so we were very happy that people's attention was being drawn to this important aspect of teaching and learning.

Nicky, your books Teaching Online (co-authored with Lindsay Clandfield) and Digital Literacies (co-authored with Gavin Dudeney and Mark Pegrum), were nominated for a British Council ELTON award in 2010 and 2013 respectively. Were you disappointed that you didn't

get an ELTON award?

Of course it's nice to win, but simply being nominated for something like the ELTON is a huge honour. Also, not winning means you don't need to make an acceptance speech, so that's the upside. Gavin and I actually won an Elton in 2007 for our online CertICT course, so we have at least tasted glory once!

Though over 80 per cent of today's world population own mobile technology and smartphone penetration in remote places is on the rise, m-learning is not so popular in many countries including India. What should be done to make m-learning more popular among teachers and learners in such countries?

Low-end mobile devices are probably the most pervasive technology in low resource contexts like India and elsewhere, so they are in fact a relatively 'easy' technology for teachers to use, because they are already there. However, a lack of training, and resistance by teachers, school directors, and even parents, can mean that implementation is not straightforward. If teachers are provided with good training, and schools are made aware of the benefits that a *judicious and effective* use of mobile devices in the classroom can bring, that's a good first step.

According to a recent report by Zenith (www.zenithmedia.com), mobile devices will account for 75% of global internet use next year. Do you think that the mobile technology will make learners less dependent on teachers in the

future? What impact will it have on ESL/EFL teaching?

Self-study English language learning mobile apps like busuu and Duolingo are popular, and can in theory help students learn English without a teacher. But a certain amount of self-discipline and sticking power is needed, and the dropout rates for users of these self-study apps is extremely high. So although these options are available to learners, many still like going to class, having a teacher, and socialising with other students.

It was believed that Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) would revolutionize higher education but MOOCs haven't gained as much popularity as expected. What could be the reasons for the waning popularity of MOOCs? What will be the future of online learning?

That's a big question! The British Council offered one of the first English language MOOCs a couple of years ago, and although thousands enrolled, dropout was high (as typically happens with MOOCs). Main reasons are the copious amounts of self-discipline and self-motivation required to take part in a MOOC. There are plenty of online language learning options for the learner to choose from though, from more formal language learning courses to informal self-study options like MOOCs and apps. I don't see the teacher being completely replaced by any of these online options though.

What is your message to the Indian teachers who are quite passionate about

integrating technology into English language teaching?

There are many free or low-cost opportunities for professional development available online these days. Join online teachers' groups such as the Webheads, or follow the IATEFL Learning Technologies SIG social media feeds (e.g. Facebook and Twitter), attend free webinars and online

conferences, take part in a teacher training MOOC... The most important thing is to make contact with like-minded teachers, both in India and beyond, and to try things out with students. There are so many opportunities for professional development and training available online these days – my main message would be to take advantage of them!

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