Cambridge Elements in Language Teaching

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Teaching English as an International Language
Ali Fuad Selvi, Nicola Galloway, and Heath Rose
Cambridge University Press, 2023, 88 pp., £17.00 (PBK)
ISBN 978-1-009-82123-0 (PBK)

English-Medium Instruction in Higher Education
David Lasagabaster
Cambridge University Press, 2022, 71 pp., £17.00 (PBK)
ISBN 978-1-108-82905-2 (PBK)

Pedagogical Translanguaging
Jasone Cenoz and Durk Gorter
Cambridge University Press, 2021, 58 pp., £17.00 (PBK)
ISBN 978-1-009-01440-3 (PBK)

Intercultural and Transcultural Awareness in Language Teaching
Will Baker
Cambridge University Press, 2022, 76 pp., £17.00 (PBK)
ISBN 978-1-108-81268-9 (PBK)

Task-Based Language Teaching
Daniel O. Jackson
Cambridge University Press, 2022, 74 pp., £17.00 (PBK)
ISBN 978-1-009-068413 (PBK)

Mediating Innovation through Language Teacher Education
Martin East
Cambridge University Press, 2022, 72 pp., £17.00 (PBK)
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Language Teacher Agency
Jian Tao and Xuesong (Andy) Gao
Cambridge University Press, 2021, 64 pp., £17.00 (PBK)
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Reflective Practice in Language Teaching
Thomas S.C. Farrell
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Ursula Stickler
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Shulin Yu
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ISBN 978-1-009-42999-3 (PBK)

Assessment for Language Teaching
Aek Phakiti and Constant Leung
Cambridge University Press, 2024, 102 pp., £17.00 (PBK)
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Across the great divide

How do you bridge the gap between the worlds of research and practice? How is it possible to prevent some educators, engaged in a daily exercise of down-to-earth teaching at the sharp end, characterizing research as irrelevant and completely divorced from the world that they inhabit? And indeed, when they do engage with academic research, sometimes, such educators hope 'that language acquisition theories will give them insight into language teaching practice' but 'are often frustrated by the lack of agreement among the "experts"' (Lightbown and Spada 2013: 121). Researchers, on the other hand, can sometimes justifiably feel disappointed that their arduous and painstaking study can be so lightly dismissed. And as if to make them even unhappier, the ELT profession has a habit of appropriating ideas from outside its immediate educational arena (for example, Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Multiple Intelligences theory, and suchlike) provoking some to passionately argue that without a solid grounding of evidence such ideas cannot, in reality, be shown to have any appreciably positive effect (see Lethaby, Mayne, and Harries 2021).

Yet as Simon Borg has so clearly pointed out (see, for example, Borg 2015) teachers all have theories of their own, sometimes the result of belief, sometimes the result of classroom experience both as earlier students and in their teaching practice, and sometimes of evidence which they have purposefully gathered as teachers within their own classroom settings. The view persists that such belief and gathered reflection (if you like) is essentially superior to other kinds of research. Anderson (2023: 4), for example, suggests that 'academics aren't the only source of theory, and the theories they produce are neither neutral nor necessarily suitable to the practice of any given teacher who might have access to them', and goes on to say that 'practitioner theory, if based on appropriate research-in-practice,

is potentially the most relevant and valid theory for *that* practitioner's context'. The scorecard so far? Theoretical academic research 0, practitioner theory 1.

Into this world of evidence vs hunch, of emotions vs reason, of suspicion and defensiveness, comes a series designed to bridge the divide between thinkers and practitioners: *Cambridge Elements for Language Teaching*, edited by Heath Rose and Jim McKinley. These Elements, in length somewhere between an undergraduate paper and an MA dissertation, aim to close the gap between researchers and practitioners by, according to the series description on the back of each title, 'allying research with language teaching practices, in its exploration of research-informed pedagogy and pedagogy-informed research'. They report on research which is a mix of academic data gathering and practitioner research-in-practice. With so many titles on offer (fifteen at the time of writing), the question has to be whether these long-form articles do indeed 'close the gap' between the two seemingly opposing camps.

I will look at eleven of the current titles, describing the contents and giving some evaluative comments before coming to conclusions about the series as a whole. The titles are discussed more or less in the order I read them, which largely depended on when they arrived at the door. One issue confused me as I read (and watched): some of these Elements have an introductory video overview in which the author or authors summarize the contents of their book, but others do not, and I can't quite see why. It does not seem to depend on the date of publication and ends up just seeming inconsistent, especially because the video abstracts that are accessible here are so well done. What a pity all of the books don't have them.

We will start by looking at four Elements that examine the role of the language itself—and most especially what language or languages we should teach in increasingly multilingual environments. We then look at two Elements that deal with Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), two elements that look at the teacher (focusing on agency and on reflective practice), one element that looks at technology, and finally, two elements dealing with assessment. We end with an overall evaluation of the series as reviewed here.

Teaching English as an International Language

The English world is full of acronyms, the authors point out: WE (World Englishes), TEIL (Teaching English as an International Language), ELF (English as a Lingua Franca), and GE (Global Englishes) to name but a few in this confused and confusing landscape. It is the delineation of these and the politics and realities they demonstrate that exercise the authors' work and imagination. Clearly, on the issues of initials and acronyms, they choose TEIL to describe what they are talking about.

Selvi, Galloway, and Rose start this Element with a background section, entitled 'More than a first, second, foreign language', and follow on with sections called 'From English to Englishes: how did we get here', 'English Today: a truly global language', 'Major Paradigms and Trends in Teaching English', 'Implications for Language Educators', 'Practical Applications for Language Educators', and finally 'Conclusion: implementing and documenting innovation'.

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When discussing the English(es) taught around the world and which one to choose, 'a major stumbling block is often a complex political decision that is intertwined with globalization' (p. 1), and indeed the political issues that surround this complicated topic give us, on the one hand, 'Linguistic Imperialism', in which conquest, imperialism (cultural and others), money, and culture play their part versus 'pragmatism', where students themselves take the decision to want to study English. The authors call this 'push vs pull'. They remind us that WE researchers point to the amazing diversity of English varieties around the world, the presentation of various local forms, the decentralization of a single variety as a universal 'norm', and the critical importance of contextually relevant and sensitive pedagogical decisions (p. 17). The implications of this, the authors say, is the need to destabilize the standard 'Inner circle' contexts and accept functional diversity, since there is 'ample evidence that those using English today will need to use English with a global community of users and curricula should prepare students for this' (p. 34). They suggest principles that inter alia include emphasizing respect for multilingualism in ELT and diverse cultures in ELT and English teacher-hiring practices in the ELT industry (and many of us teachers will understand the significance and importance of this). They suggest that students should be encouraged to engage critically with the politics of English. Further, they argue for the resistance to and deconstruction of power relationships that the materials they are studying from exemplify.

It is here that I have some slight disquiet about what is being suggested. Or rather, some worry about a possible lack of ambition. I do find myself broadly in agreement with everything the authors have said so far—we native speakers (not our fault!) have been on a long journey to get here—but then, in a section on 'Target Culture' they discuss what can be done with a text about the Starbucks coffee empire and quote Kubota's Four 'Ds' approach: Descriptive understanding of culture (the Starbucks idea of a coffeehouse as a social space), Diversity within a culture (Starbucks' contribution to coffee (sic), its appeal to mostly middle-class white neighborhoods), Dynamic nature of culture (relating the Starbucks story to the students' local situation), and Discursive constructions of culture (for example, the writing of names on coffee cups, often misspelt or mispronounced, etc.). Well yes, I found myself thinking, the Starbucks story is, maybe, interesting in its own right but why should we start from here? Why not the story of the fictional Juan Valdez, invented to promote Colombian coffee and who/which had huge international success? Or perhaps we could look at why Vietnamese coffee tastes so different from, say, Italian coffee? What about the origins and history of coffee—how it became such a globally ubiquitous drink? Or maybe something about the damaging world throwaway culture that buy-to-go coffee inspires, and so on? There's nothing wrong with examining the Starbucks story, in other words, but if decentralization means anything perhaps we shouldn't, in the words of the old Irish joke, start from here!

I have spent some time on this because the authors give it prominence. And there are two other issues too. Firstly, TEIL often seems to be about what is spoken, but a discussion of decentralization also needs, I would have thought, to discuss written forms. And finally, the authors advocate moving away from 'decontextualized selected and discrete-point items (...)

towards contextualized, constructed and performance-based tasks' (p. 59) but also say that 'without a change in assessment we will continue to see a washback effect which would make curricular innovation a difficult thing to achieve' (p. 41). I waited for more on this but as so often in this collection of Elements, authors talk about the need for a change in assessment design (and I say Amen to that) but as we shall see in the rest of this review, nowhere do any of them really suggest how this might be done. True, there is a whole Element on assessment (which I review below), but does it make up for the lack of engagement and suggestions for action in this area in the other Elements? I fear not, given the importance that so many contributors assign to this topic, almost, it feels like, in passing.

Teaching English as an International Language is a good read and raises a number of key issues about English language politics and policy. However, and despite the limitations that the series design appears to impose (though there is some variation in title length), I was left feeling a bit short-changed. I think more could have been said.

English-Medium Instruction in Higher Education

David Lasagabaster, working, as the authors of *Pedagogical Translanguaging* (below) also do, at the University of the Basque Country (I mention this because the concerns in both books are very closely aligned), starts this element with an introduction, followed by sections on the Definition of EMI (English-Medium Instruction), EMI at the University level, Stakeholders' Views, the Impact of EMI on Learning, Assessment in EMI, and after a section entitled Some Key Readings (where Lasagabaster performs a kind of mini literature review), a Conclusion.

The author is at pains to present his—or perhaps a universal—delineation of the world of EMI. It is not bilingual education, nor can it be described as Englishization, though it may be part of that process and a worry that English might overshadow other national and international languages. EMI is not CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) in this Element since CLIL is also used at primary and secondary levels. What it is, instead, 'is inextricably linked to universities' desire to attract international students...increase mobility...augment revenue...and enable graduate students to use English effectively in the workplace of the twenty-first century' (p. 1). It is going to 'carry on spreading and is here to stay' (p. 9). While most lecturers in surveys are positive about introducing EMI programs, some are insecure about their English and 'apologetic when they....(deal)..with language lessons' even though students... 'found these specific instances of attention to language helpful' (p. 27). Perhaps the answer, then, is team teaching where a content teacher, who 'should control the collaboration process' (p. 29), is aided by a language instructor whose role is to support the students' ability to handle the content.

So far so good, but there are a number of problems. For example, there is a general sense that the use of the students' L1 can be helpful, but depending on the context of the course being run, students may come from different linguistic backgrounds in which case expecting lecturers to speak multiple L1s is entirely unrealistic. A much bigger problem identified here is that 'University authorities tend to think that all students are good at English or if they are not EMI will help them to become so' (p. 37). Indeed, as so often, in matters of education policy, Lasagabaster suggests, higher

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education institutions' governing bodies seem to take students' English for granted despite all the evidence suggesting this is not so.

There is the problem too that much university teaching is administered to large classes where exchanging opinions is difficult and individual language support to individual students is near impossible. Nor is there much provision for EMI training. And on top of that some governing bodies are still wedded to a concept of 'nativeness' on the part of their instructors and their students' expectations despite the outdated fallacies that underlie these beliefs.

One of the reasons this title works for me is that the author does not merely list some of the problems inherent in the perhaps overenthusiastic expansion of the EMI universe, but rather suggests clear alternatives. For example, team teaching presents an obvious opportunity for content and language teachers to work together. Furthermore, the success of EMI programs may well depend on (almost certainly does) proper teacher preparation and/or professional development. Professional development, for example, allied with team teaching could help integrate content and language objectives, whereas professional development for EMI lecturers could be aimed at improving those lecturers' pedagogical training.

If you are an experienced EMI instructor this title might not take you too far forward except to outline the EMI landscape in a clear and consistent way, warts and all. However, if you are about to embark on this line of education *English-Medium Instruction in Higher Education* is probably the right place to start to help you orient yourself in a complex and varied landscape.

Pedagogical Translanguaging

Have you ever come across the term 'trawsiethu'? No? Neither had I, but thanks to this Element I now know that it is a Welsh language word, which means, in essence, 'translanguaging' and it was in Wales that the founding principles of this approach were first enumerated so clearly by Williams (1994). It is of particular importance in Wales where strenuous efforts have been (and continue to be) made to preserve and promote the Welsh language (Cymraeg) which according to a 2023 population survey is spoken by about 29% of the Welsh population. This is similar to the Basque language (Euzkara) spoken by about 30% across the regions where it is a prominent language. It is no surprise, therefore, that the authors, both, like David Lasagabaster, at the University of the Basque Country, are keen to spend some time on the similarity between the two situations.

I confess, at the outset, to have enjoyed this Element enormously. Maybe it's the passion and deep knowledge the authors demonstrate and their obvious love of where their attention is directed. My enjoyment was helped by the transparent 3-minute video abstract that is watchable online and in which they explain with disarming clarity what this Element is all about. As I mentioned in my introduction, I do wish all the Elements all had the same motivating introductions.

The written version has an introduction, of course, and this is followed by sections on 'What is Translanguaging?', 'What is Pedagogical Translanguaging', 'Metalinguistic Awareness, Pedagogical Translanguaging Practices and Assessment', 'Minority Languages, Immersion and CLIL', and finally, 'Conclusion and Future Perspectives'.

But back to Wales. A teaching sequence using English and Welsh is given. As far as I understand it there were two texts in English and one in Welsh (three altogether) about air, weight, and space. The questions for the English text were in English, whereas for the Welsh text, they were in Welsh. The point being made is that 'students process input in one language and then they switch the message/concept to the other language' (p. 5). This leads to cognitive engagement which is lacking in other, similar approaches. I confess to finding this a little bit confusing (maybe a bit more context might have helped), but it does suggest the switching between and merging of more than one language by the students themselves, and that's translanguaging, I suppose.

The authors are at pains to point out that this is not the same as bilingual teaching. On the contrary, Pedagogical Translanguaging 'aims at developing multilingualism in school contexts and advocates for an integrated approach to languages' (p. 2). It requires a full understanding of the input language and a sufficient grasp of the other language to be able to express messages. In one iteration, an American experience described by Ofelia García, it is a powerful mechanism to construct understandings across language groups. She describes languages as 'fluid codes framed within social practices' (p. 10).

Pedagogical translanguaging stands in stark contrast to language separation ideologues who espouse the belief that students will get confused if they have to deal with two languages at once. Much better, then, such educators believe, to have different teachers for each different language and make sure the instruction takers place in different spaces. Yet, as the authors point out, such beliefs do 'not allow language speakers to make optimal use of their multilingual resources' (p. 16). It is Cenoz and Gorter's belief that multilingual speakers can be more effective learners of a target language if they are allowed to use resources from their whole linguistic repertoire. Not only that but they will bring prior knowledge (linguistic and otherwise) to the table and where that knowledge does not match what the teacher intended great things may happen.

One of the things that pedagogical translanguaging can encourage—and which it promotes—is metalinguistic awareness, hugely useful to successful multilingualism and helpful in the assessment of multilingual environments. As for assessment itself (often, in these Elements, only alluded to in passing—but it is there, the elephant in the room!) an 'important perspective....is to consider the whole linguistic repertoire and not only the skills in one language' (p. 35). There is, the authors argue, 'a real need to replace monolingual approaches to assessment with multilingual ones' (p. 36). Well yes, but though there are references to the literature on this, including one from South Africa which is one of the few examples of a multilingual test in standard assessment, I was left wanting more and my mind filled up with issues and problems. Yes, as the authors point out, multilingual assessment is an integral part of education but there just isn't room, here, to take us further on this. That elephant gently padding through the room!

In translanguaging there needs to be an emphasis on protecting and developing the use of the minority language in the equation across the

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curriculum, and this Element shows how a heteroglossic approach can enhance linguistic and academic development, although much will depend on the specific contexts where it takes place.

Translanguaging has cropped up in discussions of CLIL, of course, but this is a different matter. It's a full-throated call for an entirely new way of looking at language(s) teaching and despite the many many questions it raises, I loved it!

Intercultural and Transcultural Awareness in Language Teaching

To get you started on this Element, Baker explains, in another helpful video abstract, what he wishes to talk about. In the print introduction he points out that 'transcultural communication is not something exotic or unusual but a normal part of everyday interactions for many of us' (p. 1). As he shows us, writing as the global lockdown was gradually coming to an end, an increase in digital communication enabled people to instantaneously interact across physical borders and spaces. He quotes from a conversation between a Thai and a Chinese student at a British university which shows a complexity of communicative resources in which, instead of a 'standard' variety, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is being demonstrated and furthermore a transcultural reality is on show which highlights 'the diverse and fluid links between culture, identity and language' (p. 2). It is those links and their implications that this Element seeks to elucidate and for which a newly envisioned transcultural pedagogy becomes necessary, meaning that 'the focus on monolingual native speaker L1 language norms and communities is neither relevant nor appropriate for L2 users of a language' (p. 46), even if it is still prevalent in the commercial production of much educational teaching materials.

After the introduction on The Role of Intercultural and Transcultural Communication in Language Teaching, the Element comprises sections on Culture and Language; Intercultural and Transcultural Communication and Intercultural and Transcultural Communication, ending with a section on Intercultural and Transcultural Language Education.

Baker goes out of his way to reposition transcultural awareness as a significant evolution away from a static essentialist view of culture and by extension to language teaching. Two ideas prevail throughout such essentialist views: one is the idea of a fixed (usually national) culture, membership of which will determine intercultural communication. One of the problems with this is the fixed or static nature of national cultural identities—the idea, for example, that a culture is either individualist or collectivist and that this will determine how a speaker behaves. It might (my example) be that because 'she is German' we believe that in talking to her we need to understand how Germans interact and she needs to understand how we behave too for the communication to be successful. Even putting aside the danger of stereotyping on the basis of ethnicity, the difficulty of this position is that neither of us in our interaction is only, say, German or Lebanese, for example, and even if that happens to be where we are from, it does not give much of an insight into our cultural identities. We all belong to a multiple range of different cultures, discourse communities, faith groups, and family groups and these cultures or mini-cultures are simply not static. On the contrary, 'culture needs to be seen as a dynamic and changing process' (p. 10). Baker stresses 'the importance

of questioning boundaries between language modes, cultures and nations' in order to 'emphasise a more holistic approach to understanding communication and meaning-making that does not artificially isolate and separate interrelated elements' (p. 29). This is especially important since any L2 speaker is by that very reality inhabiting a liminal space in which transcultural understanding is a prerequisite for success. Communicative competence, in other words, needs to include (or even be subsumed by) transcultural competence. 'The overall aims of a transcultural pedagogy', the author writes in his conclusion, 'go beyond awareness raising (although this is still a crucial step) and include change in the learners that, in turn, results in action through the learners' engagement with a diverse range of communities across cultural and linguistic boundaries (...) there will be no single methodology that is relevant and appropriate in all situations (...) teachers are unlikely to fall into one category or the other and may adopt different elements from both approaches depending on circumstances and preferences' (p. 63).

Perhaps it is not necessary to go beyond the discussion and literature reviews here on the nature of intercultural and transcultural awareness. After all 'awareness' is in the title and the author clearly explains what he is talking about, but this series is all about 'allying research with language teaching practices' (see the introduction to this survey review) and I see no sign of that alliance here except to point out that we need to move away from an over-reliance on a certain kind of static and rigid 'culture' in ELT materials. What, though would it/might it mean in practice? Personally, I could not discern any real answers here.

Task-Based Language Teaching

The next two Elements we look at both deal with a popular but frequently and disappointingly underused offshoot of the Communicative Approach, namely Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). True, the various descriptions of TBLT are inconsistent in how they advocate the procedure which they think exemplifies the approach, and yes, there are all sorts of potential difficulties in implementing TBLT, but the promise it offers is seductively attractive, even if, as one of the titles suggests, it can be a hard struggle implementing a strong version of TBLT in some settings.

Daniel O. Jackson's *Task-Based Language Teaching* offers full-throated approval of TBLT, though, to be fair, he is completely aware of some of the challenges that adopting this kind of approach might face. To get a preview of how you might feel about it, you should look at the very clear and helpful video abstract that very pleasingly comes with this Element, where he lays out the parameters of his offering.

Jackson quotes a wide range of theory and research, in particular from situations and organizations that have experimented with or adopted TBLT approaches. There is very little skepticism on offer here, which, while it suits my personal preference, began to worry me as I read on. What the title does do, however, is to lay out the topography of the approach and key components of it in a comprehensive way.

TBLT, the author assures us at the beginning of this book, 'has grown to become one of the most widely recognized options for designing and

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implementing language instruction today' (p. 1), and right at the outset I looked for some acknowledgment of the fact that though it most certainly is widely recognized, it may not be widely adopted or practiced in the ELT world, at least as the principle guiding arrangement of courses and curricula. But that does not dent the author's enthusiasm, exemplified by his last sentence, which concludes that 'TBLT may ultimately contribute to empowering students and transforming society for the better' (p. 56). Wow! I bet they never said that about Grammar Translation! Or maybe they did... But the conclusion accurately sums up what to me seems like a very rose-tinted view of this approach.

Task-Based Language Teaching starts with a section on 'What is TBLT?' and continues with sections on The Task-Based Curriculum, Task-Based Approaches in Context, Research into TBLT, and Teachers and Tasks, and finishes with an Epilogue: The Potential of TBLT. There also is an Appendix with discussion questions. Jackson reminds us of the International Association of Task-Based Language Teaching (IATBLT) and tells us that TBLT has become mainstream educational policy in schools in Belgium, Hong Kong, and New Zealand (the latter in fact being the subject of the next Element under review here).

Jackson avers that TBLT offers opportunities for meaningful communication which can lead to acquisition because there is practice to attain fluency, it utilizes features of language that may be a challenge to learn and that the 'choices regarding lesson content and procedures' are 'thus more meaningful and engaging learning experiences' (p. 3). The question that remains, Jackson tells us, is how can education be linked to relevant, real-world activities while also promoting meaningful language use with a clear objective. He then goes on to detail different pedagogic task types, namely jigsaw, information gap, problem-solving, decision-making, and opinion exchange. These are exemplified with brief descriptions of what are now fairly standard activity types in ELT classrooms. In the section on the Task-Based Curriculum, there is a discussion of needs analysis based on the assumption that it is 'more efficient, particularly in the case of adults, to tailor instruction to this specific academic, professional, or vocational domain in which the learners intend to use the language' (p. 13). In the section on Materials Development (section 2.3) a variety of compromises are suggested, for example, integrating task-based materials into lessons, consulting domestically published teaching handbooks for tasks that can support the curriculum, adopting commercially available task-based textbooks, trying out communicative tasks on the internet, modifying existing materials, making use of sample task-based plans used by teachers and, finally, reading about specific applications of TBLT.

Despite my carping from the sidelines I would nevertheless recommend this Element highly. Why? Because it situates TBLT both historically and pedagogically. True, there is the possibility of a danger that it might be an over-Pollyanna-ish view of its subject, but for anyone wanting to get an idea of TBLT geography it is a very good start on which to build further understanding. More importantly for this survey review, Jackson's offering is the perfect preamble for the next Element I want to discuss.

**Mediating
Innovation
through Language
Teacher Education**

A question that has preoccupied teacher educators and others working in teacher development, certainly for as long as I have been in this profession, is whether we should try and convince practitioners of the merits of a new idea, new practices, or approaches and if so, how do we set about doing it? There is a lot of anecdotal evidence, for example, of teachers who travel to different countries for 'refresher' courses where they are introduced to all sorts of proselytizing innovations only to revert seamlessly to their usual way of teaching when they return to their own educational realities back at home, as if they were rejecting entirely all the fun and games they were offered on those courses. Does that make the work we do on refresher courses inappropriate and at worst entirely futile?

Martin East's account of how to deal with these quandaries offers an exemplary picture of how training for innovation works—and doesn't work—and relates his own attempts at self-development as he strives to be more effective in inculcating his trainees into the theory and practice of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). The contextual setting is New Zealand, where in the national curriculum 'TBLT was *encouraged* (but not specified or required) as a realization of published expectations of the revised curriculum' (p. 21). In the excellent video abstract that accompanies this work East asks 'Did my own reflective approach to innovation work?' and in the end that's what this title is all about.

Spoiler alert! East concludes that 'The findings presented here lead to the encouraging conclusion that beginning teachers' practices *can* be enhanced with suitable mediation, and this is a beneficial outcome', and that 'teachers' beliefs and practices can and do change when confronted with innovative ideas, albeit sometimes in small and incremental ways' (p. 63).

Mediating Innovation through Language Teacher Education starts with an eponymous section on Mediating Innovation through Language Teacher Education and continues with sections on Teacher Education as the Vehicle for Pedagogical Innovation, a move to a focus on New Zealand, Introducing the New Zealand Case, a section on A Longitudinal Research Project into Mediating Pedagogical Innovation, and a final Discussion section.

The Element begins with the author telling us that innovation is a constant in our lives as educators but that implementing it can be a tricky business. There is, he points out, 'a persistent struggle between innovation and tradition' (p. 2), which is of course true as much in education as in other areas of life. One way of helping teachers to innovate in the face of that struggle is teacher education. This is what East has done with his trainees and on more than one course. This Element details his approach, the problems and successes along the way, and how with each iteration he has attempted to shift his practice based on a good deal of self-reflection in which he conscientiously tries to improve his own efficacy as a teacher educator with the trainees who would go into—or continue in—the state school system. Along the way we get to read some vignettes of comments by a few of the trainees themselves detailing their anxieties and experiences. East is at pains to point out that teacher cognition and reflective practice are key components of any approach to development. Unless we get to find out 'where' teachers/trainees are in terms of belief and opinions, he points out, we have little hope of training to their

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needs. He wants them to know that beliefs are neither right nor wrong, information that could look, to them, like an avoidance of responsibility perhaps, but we can understand where he is coming from.

Anyway, his trainees discuss and learn about the theory and practice of TBLT before going into schools to try out tasks. East recognized in his own self-reflection how important it was to accompany them to 'help them implement tasks' (p. 25). When they came back to the training environment they had to do a 10-minute presentation explaining the task and how it went and especially introducing the context of the school (type, class, etc.), justifying the task with reference to the literature and explain how they might want to change it if they were to use it again. But, it is worth pointing out, getting trainees to rethink some beliefs and be open to new ideas is one thing, but that school context, well, that's quite another! Some experienced teachers there were obviously not very encouraging and 'many teachers in New Zealand do not teach according to task-based precepts even if at times they may believe themselves to do so' (p. 53). Those (mostly) older in-school teachers were not necessarily encouraging and the situations themselves were often very challenging such that 'contextual challenges were dampening some participants' enthusiasm' (p. 31). And so East sought to 'moderate the negative effects of occupational socialization by promoting a continually critical reflective stance that nonetheless acknowledges the limitations of contextual constraints' (p. 34).

Interestingly—and this may be a fairly typical stance—East ends up 'positioning myself as favouring a hybrid that sees TBLT as a development of, rather than a sweeping departure from, prior practice, one that encourages (…) the use of tasks, but also one that can accommodate task use within more traditional teacher-fronted elements' (p. 15).

I started this particular review by describing the disappointment some trainers feel that their wonderful ideas are not immediately adopted when trainees/teachers return to their own educational environments. Perhaps East can ameliorate this feeling because 'It is also clear that the ITE initiative enabled seeds of innovation to be sown, and those seeds could give rise to subsequent seeking out of further opportunities to explore innovation' (p. 46). It is all part of a long-term journey! Whether for reassurance, interest, or to be better informed this Element is, in my opinion, well worth a read.

Language Teacher Agency

Jian Tao and Xuesong (Andy) Gao's stated task, here, is to 'demonstrate how engagement with (agency) will enhance language teachers' professional development'. This is important because as language teachers find themselves having to endure ongoing shifts in educational policies and curricula 'teachers may be too disillusioned to remain in the profession' (p. 1). The Element starts with an introduction and is followed by a section on What is Agency? and a section on Why Agency Matters? It then goes on to present sections on Teacher Agency Interacting with other Key Constructs, on What Can Be Done to Enhance Language Teachers' Sense of Agency, on The Significance of Collective Agency, and finally on Advancing a Trans-perspective of Language Teacher Agency Research.

In the authors' understanding, agency is often perceived of as action upon different contexts such as school culture and policy contexts where

'teachers may autonomously display resistance towards a particular policy' (p. 3), but in case anyone thinks that the concept of teacher agency is the same as teacher autonomy, for the authors it has more to do with identity than with 'going it alone'. For example, the teacher-student relationship as an environmental factor may not affect teacher autonomy, but 'it does affect self-efficacy and outcome expectation, which in turn influence agency' (p. 5), and agency 'is the result of the individual and contextual resources and constraints' (p. 9). Teachers need agency at all stages of professional development so that they can develop a sense of authority which, if I understand it correctly, is a different concept from autonomy. It simply means that teachers have some control over their own identity. Sometimes this does involve 'going it alone' (my way of referring to it, not the authors') and they detail the case of a teacher who, when assigned to teach legal English, took herself off to night school to study law. There are others who explore innovative pedagogic practices to accommodate student needs, or who take on extra responsibilities and decide to help their colleagues because 'language teachers make agentic choices to fulfil their identify commitments' (p. 31).

Language Teacher Agency focuses on a small number of Chinese university teachers, which makes the Element interesting but which, I feel, restricts the generalizability of what is being discussed even if it does raise various issues that crop up. One thing that does come up (and this has been mentioned in other Elements because it is an ongoing problem with historical roots in writings and considerations about language teaching) is that 'non-native speakers may feel less empowered and have a diminished sense of agency in language teaching' (p. 39). Another barrier to exercising control over 'their own teaching practice and professional development' (p. 34) is the absence of robust beliefs about education, something the authors suggest which needs working on. But they point out that language teaching, specifically, has additional stressors such as high intercultural and linguistic demands as well as 'frequent use of energy-intense methodologies' (p. 32).

The authors situate agency in relation to other key concepts such as social cognitive theory, sociocultural theory, post-structural views, and ecological perspectives, but they get extremely persuasive when they argue that 'individual teachers do not exercise agency in isolation' (p. 7). On the contrary, 'teachers can enhance their sense of agency through participating in small professional learning groups of teachers who share similar goals' (p. 37). Collective action, they argue, may make a bigger difference for individual teachers in pursuit of their professional development and job security. In a world where an individual teacher may have difficulty in the contexts they work in, especially at the early stages of their career, working with others may make all the difference.

Finally, Tao and Gao present a crossing-borders *trans*-perspective that shows the actions on institutional organizations of collective agency where language teachers engage with other agents with perhaps cross-linguistic networking (that is with, for example, native-speaker teachers). Included in the model are the teachers' identities, knowledge, beliefs, and emotion while they grapple with translingual/intercultural/language-making policy practices.

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I sometimes thought, as I read through this Element, that the authors were trying to do too much in the space they had. That being said, their enumeration of the barriers to agency—for example, institutional power in which individuals find it difficult to be autonomous, nervousness about potential language inadequacies—and how these might be ameliorated through collective action, networking, and discussion with like-minded colleagues and peers was very convincing and well-argued.

Reflective Practice in Language Teaching

Anyone who has an interest in so-called 'Reflective teaching' will know the name of Thomas Farrell. As he himself points out he's been worrying away at the topic since his first cited publication on reflective practice in 1999. He is well placed, therefore, to take stock of where his research leads him more than twenty years later. The Element profiles what he calls his 'comprehensive argument for reconsidering a framework [he] devised for a five-stage approach to language teacher reflective practice, supported by an in-depth case study [he] conducted' (p. 1). He starts his offering with a Background section, continues with a section entitled 'Standing on the shoulders of Giants: Dewey and Schön', moves to sections on Reflective Practice in Action, and on Moving Forward with Reflective Practice: Possibilities for Further Dialogue, and ends with a Conclusion section.

Farrell's argument is a mixture of admiration and reservations for the seminal works of firstly John Dewey's writings on reflective thinking and the educative process (Dewey 1933) and Schön's (1987) *Educating the reflective practitioner*. Whereas Dewey 'maintained that the practitioner should suspend action when confronted with a problem and after going through the steps of reflective enquiry, to take action only in the final stage', Schön 'encouraged the practitioner to continue to reflect during action ("action present") in an attempt to reshape what the practitioner is doing while he or she is doing it' (p. 13). In other words, there is a clear divide between *reflective inquiry* (that is, reflection-on-action—Dewey) and double-loop learning (that is, reflection-in-action). Farrell suggests that these two concepts are, in the first place, widely misunderstood and secondly he finds that there are shortcomings in both of these theories. He acknowledges, of course, that both Dewey and Schön are foundational in terms of the field of teacher development (the 'giants' in his description), but—and this is the main thrust of this offering—he wants to expand on their work and propose a new and differently focused model. To explain his approach he maintains that 'the person-as-teacher cannot be divorced from the act of teaching and reflection' and so believes that 'reflection is grounded in the notion that teachers are whole persons and the person-as-teacher should be a part of the reflection process' (p. 15). What he is suggesting, in other words, is that both Dewey and Schön offered models that were too abstract, too divorced from the actual emotions that drive most teachers. Furthermore, both offer 'ends-based models where problems must be solved regardless of when they occur (*in*-action or *on*-action)' (p. 17). This leaves no space for uncertainty or ambiguity and practitioners themselves are somewhat divorced from the process.

What is needed, Farrell suggests, is a more holistic approach to reflecting on practice. We should not prioritize technical, rational teachers, but rather practitioners who know who they are, why they do what they do, what they

want to do, how they do it, and what this all means for them. This leads him to his own new framework for reflective practice which has five inter-related elements: *Philosophy* (practice is dependent on basic philosophy accumulated since birth), *Principles* (a teacher's assumptions and beliefs about ELT, which will become more visible as they reflect on principles of teaching and learning), *Theory* (developed from philosophy and principles and evolving through reflections on critical incidents in classrooms), *Practice* (examining what a teacher does and how this aligns with their philosophy, principle, and theory), and *Beyond practice* (the influence of emotional, ethical, community-based social issues which impact teachers' practices both inside and outside the classroom). This framework, the author claims, is 'descriptive, not prescriptive' (p. 23), and by way of illustration he takes us to Costa Rica where pseudonymous Damien teaches and along the way follows the five-stage framework. Without going into details, what is notable here is the descriptions of Damien's feelings, the clashes he feels between his personal ethics and those of the institution where he worked. 'I've actually been kind of *angry* at the type of advertising they've been doing for courses lately.......I would feel like kind of *offended*' (Farrell's italics, p. 36), he says, whereas when he talked about his students he used far more positive language attributes and showed how much he wanted them to have a good experience with him as a teacher. This goes to show, Farrell claims, that teachers as emotional beings are moved by aspects of their work 'because they are passionate about their practice' (p. 39) and as a result research into teacher reflection should move toward a greater understanding of teacher self and how teachers' emotions can become sites of resistance and self-transformation. Engaging in reflective practice is not just a cognitive issue; it is also a deeply emotional one. Teachers' reflections help them to seek to legitimize their practices within different organizations such as language schools. Further, teachers and other professionals should be enabled to discuss all this, for failure to do so would leave reflection ill-defined and instead be intellectual exercises set to solve perceived problems. That, Farrell argues, is not what this is all about. On the contrary, reflective practice is, in his formulation, 'a cognitive, emotional process, accompanied by a set of attitudes in which language teachers systematically collect data about their practice ....and use the data to make informed decisions about their practice both inside and outside the classroom' (p. 47).

Farrell has argued his case with commitment and passion, two attributes that help to get his argument over the line. The idea of bringing the teacher 'self' into the reflective paradigm seems to me to be convincing as a possible approach to this topic, a development from the two 'originators' (in a sense) of this whole field. That teacher 'Damien' was available to put himself through this way of looking at reflective practice appears as extremely admirable and the researcher's care to observe and report on his (Damien's) thought processes commendable. That being said, however, Damien is only one educator and the experience, as far as I can tell, is based on only a couple of classes and how he engaged with his responses and the world around him. Farrell's five-element framework would need a much more extensive trial than this to become more universally accepted. Nevertheless, anyone involved in thinking about, training about, or practicing reflective processes should definitely read this short account.

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Technology and Language Teaching

Because this work has already been reviewed in the *ELT Journal* in a different context (Kohnke 2024) I will not discuss its content except to say that it is something of a tonal outlier from other books in the series. Sure, Stickler discusses general training and development options for teachers facing a digital world, as they did suddenly and with no option in 2020, but this Element has the problem of all printed materials that relate to the rapidly evolving world of technology. AI appears as a brief mention only once, though in the author's defense a section on 'future proofing' for whatever comes next is a useful contribution. She also points out the affordances that online teaching offers to challenge native speakerism and shift the power imbalances that occur in face-to-face classrooms. But there are tasks too and these stray into entirely different territory. We are asked, for example, to 'doodle or imagine a path. In your mind start walking along this path, focus on the forward direction it takes you...feel the movement of air and ground beneath your feet. Keep walking.....Allow yourself a pause and think about what you would like to find at the end of the path' (pp. 5–6) and later on, in a different task 'Do you like the structured approach? Or do you feel doubt and concern? Maybe you are confused or annoyed. This might have to do with your epistemological stance and whether a structured approach matches it or not' (p. 45). In this latter task I personally felt none of the options she offers, except, I think, confused, but not in the way she means. Her second-guessing of this reader falls, for me, at the level of plausibility, partly because, perhaps, we are less patient when reading this kind of thing than we might be in a more face-to-face encounter. But the serious point is to try and understand the shift from the series as a whole (broadly academic) to this more personal style. I must say that I personally found the change in tone jarring and wondered what arguments the series editors might deploy for its inclusion.

Peer Assessment in Writing Instruction

Shulin Yu's work is more of a literature review than anything else, but as such it offers a clear overview of research in and for various different foci of peer assessment. Through this Element runs the author's belief that all the published articles and studies so far have been somewhat uni-focused. He writes that peer assessment scholarship 'seems to view peer assessment predominantly as a mechanism of assessment for learning (AfL)' and that this 'risks overlooking or under-emphasizing alternative roles that peer assessment might play in learners' writing development' (p. 1). Nevertheless, it is increasingly used as an ingredient of 'collaborative learning' and is a major assessment activity in writing classrooms in a variety of school and university settings.

After the introduction, the Element presents a section on Conceptual Framework: Peer Assessment of, for and as Learning in Writing Classrooms, followed by sections on peer assessment in different specific contexts—Peer Assessment in the L1 Writing Context, in the EFL/ESL University Writing Context, in the EAP/ESP Writing Context, in the ESL/EFL School Writing Context, in Foreign Language Writing Contexts and finally a section entitled 'Moving Forward with Peer Assessment in Writing Instruction: Possibilities for Future Dialogue'.

The author's stated intent is to show that it is necessary to move beyond that uni-focus on AfL, important though it is. Peer assessment also has an

important part to play in summative evaluation of student writing (AoL—or assessment of learning) thus allowing teachers to act upon the feedback on students' performance it gives them and, furthermore, peer assessment can enable students to develop their cognitive and metacognitive capacities in self-evaluating their own writing ability and self-regulating their writing process and performance (AaL, or assessment as learning). He provides a conceptual framework to describe peer assessment for learning in writing classrooms. Summarizing the literature he has referenced he notes that 'these studies illustrated how providing and receiving peer feedback facilitates students' cognitive and metacognitive development, which finally leads to improved quality in writing...' and he adds, to my mind interestingly, that 'Providing peer reviews appears to facilitate writing improvement to a greater extent in comparison with receiving peer reviews' (p. 13).

A lot may depend upon the context in which peer assessment is used. For example, in EAP contexts students seem to gain significant metacognitive knowledge as well as having language awareness improvement, which enhance their critical thinking skills, and quite a few studies seem to show this, whereas in ESL/EFL school settings the research is considerably more limited. At least one study, however, suggests, and this matches our intuitive grasp of this, that teacher intervention and guidance are significantly important when students assess each others' work. It requires adequate teacher instruction and training for it to work well. Indeed, peer assessment is valued by students but observable improvements 'were believed to have resulted from teachers' comprehensive instructions, well-designed assessment standards or rubrics, and sufficient scaffolding throughout the whole peer assessment process' (p. 32). On the other hand, and despite the effectiveness of peer assessment practices in various contexts, implementing it in L2 classrooms 'is not easy' (p. 41).

Shulin Yu ends his account by proposing that ongoing research should focus on student engagement with the process and highlight student agency in the process of peer assessment.

This report on peer assessment in writing is an interesting account of (some of) the research that has been done in this area. It is good for all nonspecialists on the topic to read about what has been found and surmised in experimental experiences and for this we should be grateful. There is, nevertheless, the nagging feeling that we have only just, in this title, skimmed the surface. There is a lot more to understand!

Assessment for Language Teaching

And finally here it is, the elephant in the room, this consequential topic that other authors in the series have alluded to; assessment, testing, evaluation, and all that stuff. What will it have to say about this most ubiquitous but, from my point of view, baleful element (small 'e') of the language learning and teaching world—and you will have to say whether this book agrees with me or has a more benign view of the need for, design of and administration of tests.

If I tell you that this Element ends by quoting Bernard Spolsky that 'tests, like guns, are potentially so powerful as to be commonly misused' you'll get a flavor of the authors' approach to this particular room-occupying

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elephant. That sounds worryingly like Tests don't kill education, teachers (test designers, authorities) kill education—to bowdlerize a well-known formulation by gun owners in the United States! Nevertheless, in a comprehensive account of assessment and testing the authors are open to pointing out the pitfalls and problems of this arm of our profession.

After an introduction, the book includes sections entitled Assessment, Essential Concepts in Assessment, Types of Language Assessment, Key Theoretical and Technical Concepts, Summative Assessment design—Types and Processes, Quality Aspects in Assessment, and Further developments, ending with an Appendix of Test Specifications and a Glossary of Language Assessment. A useful Video abstract in which Phakiti and Leung present their work (the link is in the book) explains how the book is laid out: why we assess people and what do we use it for, what are the different aspects of teaching and how can we use assessment to promote better teaching.

In the printed version Phakiti and Leung state that the Element 'aims to help teachers develop language assessment literacy' (p. 5), surely a laudable aim because everyone in ELT is involved or affected by testing since all assessment activities have power and consequences and anyway teachers are often asked to help students prepare.

The authors offer various testing purposes, formative, summative, diagnostic, placement, and gatekeeping (when tests are used to determine candidate entry to universities, etc.). Testing is seen as a form of assessment, itself a type of evaluation. They differentiate between language proficiency and language-using skills.

A notable feature of *Assessment in Language Teaching* is the eighteen 'Scan me' QR codes spread through the book, which take us to YouTube videos discussing various aspects of the topic. Here there is a wide variety of tone and approach from the people and voices we see represented. Some videos are mostly informative, such as No. 6 on assessing general language proficiency, No. 11 on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), and No. 13 on test development. Canadian Julie Williams tells us about different types of tests in No. 4, Cambridge English tells us about the Language-orientated Assessment cycle (No. 15), and Dylan Wiliam talks in some detail about the pitfalls of certain test concepts such as reliability and validity (construct validity and other types of validity) after suggesting that assessment is the bridge between teaching and learning (No. 16).

There are some enjoyable accounts of teachers talking about their own practice from schools in New South Wales, Australia (Nos. 1 and 9) and sometimes the videos are at pains to point out how to make things work well (Nos. 14 and 18). But others come over very differently, such as Linda Darling-Hammond from Stanford University in a TEDex talk railing against the pernicious affect and types of tests and explaining why the Singaporean approach is so superior (No. 2). Chris Quackenbush, the chair of the Florida Citizens Alliance in the United States, goes hell-for-leather in her attack on the pernicious effect of standardized tests from some of the big commercial providers, and how teachers are judged—and sometimes lose their jobs—on the basis of test scores, just as students can learn how to

be failures. It is strong stuff and is enough to make anyone become an anti-tester—at least of many standardized multiple-choice-based exams. An apocalyptic video (including a rather muddled TV discussion) bemoans the decline in writing standards as measured by tests in New South Wales, Australia (No. 1). But for me, the most convincing and passionate video is of a TEDex talk given by American Karen Leung, a daughter of Cantonese immigrants, whose amazing plea for bi- and multi-linguals to be admired and respected rather than demeaned for their less than perfect native-speaker language, especially where, as in the United States, there is actually no official language. We should respect what people say, not how they say it, she argues fiercely, and had I been in that audience I too would have cheered.

The problem with online links, however, is never quite knowing how long they will last. Here only one (12) appears to have withered and died with 'this video is unavailable' appearing on the screen. But if I come back to *Assessment for Language Teaching* in a year I wonder if any others will have faded too. It is difficult to know what to do about this except perhaps for the authors to make it clear that they are aware of this danger and at the very least set the date where/when the QR code was made. A more extensive solution would be to have summaries of each video but that would be very space-hungry. In a print book, the danger will always be there, especially since some QR codes tend to expire anyway.

The authors' overview of assessment and assessment issues in this title (that is, describing essential concepts in, and types of, assessment, describing different kinds of summative assessment) is well-handled. The videos, however, especially the more polemical ones, are more problematic. True, as I have indicated, some of them really got me going but I couldn't quite work out where this Element was taking us and how the authors felt about the opinions expressed and exactly how some of the videos related to the text. There is, of course, an argument to be had about the tension between the value that assessment offers and, on the other hand, the potential damage that the whole testing industry does to individuals, institutions, and curricula and about how it would be if we diminished our apparent enthusiasm for testing everything that moves, quite apart from a detailed discussion of test design itself. However, I think we needed clearer guidance from the authors about how to situate ourselves with the various issues that are raised here.

I came to this Element hoping to find some answers to the assertions (in earlier Elements I had read) that the various developments in the field of language teaching mean that tests will have to change or that a lot depends on how assessment deals with the new directions different researchers suggest. Alas I didn't quite find what I hoped to see and was somewhat puzzled by the variety of tone I found in this book.

Cambridge Elements in Language Teaching: an evaluation

If you have read this far you will have grasped something of the range in this series. This is not just in terms of the topics but also in the variable tone (see, for example, the Element on Technology vs Language Teacher Agency; Peer Assessment vs Teaching English as an International Language) and emotional resonance (Pedagogical Translanguaging vs Intercultural and Transcultural Awareness in Language Teaching) which

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different authors bring to their task. This means that whereas some of these Elements are serious and purposefully forensic (in intention, anyway), others seem much more relaxed and emotional and as in the titles on technology and assessment uncertain of where they wished to position themselves. The editors will have their reasons for inclusion but for this reader at least they were a bit difficult to discern.

Some of these Elements seem, though diligently argued, fairly slight. It is possible to imagine some teachers finding scant nourishment here, especially if they were looking for practical suggestions rather than more generalizable statements of principle. Then there are problems of scale. A focus on one teacher or maybe three is not entirely convincing, I think.

Having said that, there is much to learn and ponder on in these titles. Many practicing teachers are necessarily generalists with so many calls on their attention that they have little time to focus in detail on any specific topic. The authors in this series do precisely that and I defy anyone to read an Element and not have a strong reaction to what they see and read. I end up asking myself why anyone would not want to have these Elements (and maybe more; I have no idea how many more are in the pipeline) on their shelves or in their document folders.

The best single feature, for me, is the video abstracts that are available for some titles. They offer straightforward clarity and excellent signposting. There will be a range of issues I am sure—practical, logistical, etc.—why they are not available for the whole series, because they should be.

In the end though—and because it was commented on in quite a few titles, and because readers of this review will have noticed my continued commenting on the subject—our profession needs to be able to see and perhaps confront the relationship between teaching and assessment, especially because it is frequently mentioned by the various authors in the series. It governs everything that is done in language teaching, yet, and despite some of more forthright videos accessed by Phakiti and Leung's title (see above), few ask the vitally important questions about the effect is has and what, in the end, it is for.

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