



10 Trending Professional Development Topics in ELT

by [Laura Baecher](#)

When the school year comes to a close, it's a great time to look at some of the trends, key topics, and themes in teacher professional development (PD). The term “trending” can have a negative connotation, suggesting that an idea is simply a passing fad—but the intention in this article is to recognize the great responsiveness and energy in our wide global TESOL community and to remark on how flexible and forward-thinking our profession is. In so many ways, PD topics in our field are years ahead of other fields, and in so many institutional contexts, the English language teaching (ELT) professionals are the vanguard of change and positive growth.

This progressive dynamic within the field of ELT means that PD is continually evolving and offers educators extensive opportunities to learn and grow professionally and personally. From accessing ideas via the printed word via blogs, newsletters, books, and journal articles to sharing information and ideas in videos, webinars, and online conferences, there is an abundance of PD available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Many topics continue to surface year after year, as these relate to ever-relevant topics, such as developing materials, integrating content and language objectives, or addressing the needs of young learners.

Apart from these familiar topics, and in no particular rank order, here are 10 topics that have appeared frequently in the TESOL community. To arrive at the list, I reviewed a number of publications, including the program books from several ELT organizations, news and blog posts, and English language teacher newsletters. (Note: Accessing the conference program book after a conference is completed can be a useful strategy to keep your finger on the pulse of what is of high relevance to educators in any given year.)

Following are the topics that appeared quite often.

10. Overcoming Teacher Burnout

PD in this area focuses on recognizing the stress teachers are living in on a daily basis, approaches to self-care, and finding ways to create better structures within schools so that teachers can address dilemmas that are within their locus of control.

To learn more, read:

- [8 Reasons Teachers Are Burned Out \(And 4 Ways to Help\)](#), by *Judie Haynes*
- [3 Ways to Get From “Burned Out” to “On Fire”](#), by *Laura Baecher*

9. Mindfulness

PD in this area focuses on social-emotional learning; student, teacher, and staff well-being; and intentionally creating space in the curriculum for learning about ourselves and implementing routines and practices that promote self-awareness and positive ways to collaborate with others.

To learn more, read:

- [Social-Emotional Learning in the English Language Classroom: A Free Lesson on Mindfulness](#), by *Luis Javier Pentón Herrera and Gilda Martínez-Alba*
- [Mindfulness for ELT Professionals](#), by *Trish Reilly*

8. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

PD in this area focuses on identifying our own biases and identities as teachers, and then learning more and celebrating students’ home cultures, languages, and experiences and seeing these as resources upon which to build curriculum and classroom community.

To learn more, read:

- [Practical Strategies for Culturally Relevant Lessons for ELs](#), by *Chih-Hsin Hsu*
- [Placing Identity at the Epicenter of Socially Just Classrooms](#), by *Nancy Kwang Johnson and Nicole Brun-Mercer*
- [5 Activities to Explore Cultural Diversity](#), by *Naashia Mohamed*

7. Translanguaging

PD in this area focuses on challenging monolingual assumptions (like English-only policies) and strategically and thoughtfully creating classrooms tapping into the research that shows that home languages are a powerful resource for learning content and developing English language skills.

To learn more, read:

- [How to Use English Learners’ Primary Language in the Classroom](#), by *Valentina Gonzalez*
- [2 Translanguaging Practices for Developing Biliteracy](#), by *Sandra Mercuri and Vivian Pratts*

6. LGBTQ+

PD in this area focuses on curricular, programmatic, and policy decisions that can support English learner students and educators who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, among other sexualities) community, to ensure their voices are heard and to address stereotypes, bias, and microaggressions to make for more inclusive classrooms and workplaces.

To learn more, read:

- [LGBTQ+ Identity in the TESOL Classroom](#), by Nicolas Gatz
- [Queering ESL Teaching: Pedagogical and Materials Creation Issues](#), by Joshua M. Paiz

5. Formative Assessment

PD in this area focuses on how to move away from a testing culture to one in which ongoing, low-stakes assessment informs teachers' understanding of learners' progress and the impact of their curriculum in order to make in-the-moment adjustments, with consideration of “ungrading” and other approaches that emphasize self-assessment over testing.

To learn more, read:

- [Fun Ways to Assess Speaking](#), by Elif Yasin Holocsi
- [3 Strategies for Formative Assessment and Feedback](#), by Hetal Ascher

4. Creativity

PD in this area focuses on how to spark creativity in learners by making classroom activities more language-rich through setting up tasks that are high engagement, open ended, novel, and use approaches from theater education and the arts.

To learn more, read:

- [Creative ELT Activities for Children and Children-at-Heart](#), by Laura Loder Buechel
- [Exploring Creativity in TESOL Professional Learning](#), by Laura Baecher

3. Technology for Communication

PD in this area focuses on using the availability and access of online conferencing and collaborative writing tools to connect English learners from different parts of the world.

To learn more, read:

- [3 Digital Tools to Increase Speaking Practice](#), by Weina Li Chen
- [Virtual Exchange: Collaborating to Create](#), by Margita Vojtkulakova

2. ChatGPT/AI

PD in this area focuses on how to understand the ways in which artificial intelligence platforms such as ChatGPT are changing the nature of writing assignments and the assessment of writing in English learning contexts, with an emphasis on capitalizing on and incorporating these tools into teaching and student work rather than resisting them.

To learn more, read:

- [4 AI Chrome Plugins to Boost English Language Learning](#), by Brent Warner
- [ChatGPT in ELT: Writing Affordances and Activities](#), by Alessandra Elisabeth dos Santos, Larisa Olesova, Cristiane Vicentini, and Luciana C. de Oliveira

1. Teaching in the Postpandemic Era

PD in this area focuses on changes in workplace environments, use of curriculum and technology, applicability of previously adapted learning frameworks, and how to reengage both students and teachers in face-to-face instruction as well as continuing to utilize distance learning.

To learn more, read:

- [Rethinking Professional Development at Your School Post Pandemic](#), by Gary Johnston
- [ESL Teaching and Post-Pandemic: What Changed?](#), by Altiné Mni

Questions to Ask Yourself

As you plan your professional development for the upcoming school year, ask yourself these questions:

- Which topics do you want to learn more about?
- Which topic do you believe should be a focus of your institution's PD agenda?

NOTE: A version of this article first appeared in the [TESOL Blog](#), 22 December 2022.

Dr. Laura Baecher is professor of TESOL at Hunter College, City University of New York. Her research interests and publications relate to teacher education, including educational technology in teacher learning, observation and coaching for English language teaching, and professional development in TESOL. Her recent books are [Using Video to Support Teacher Reflection and Development in ELT](#) and [Reflecting on Problems of Practice in TESOL](#). She has served as chair of TESOL International Association's Teacher Education Interest Section, an English language specialist for the U.S. Department of State, and president of the New York State TESOL affiliate.